





KITTY THE RAG

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BY
"RITA"

AUTHOR OF "SHEBA," "A WOMAN IN IT," "MASTER WILBER-
FORCE," "DAME DURDEN," ETC.



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CHAPTER I.

“GET in out of that, ye little blayguard—ye.”

“I’ll not get in—I want to see Biddy,” said a childish voice.

“Biddy ’ll not be home this hour an’ more. Get along as I tould ye, an’ don’t be disgracin’ the place wid yer dirty face and yer rags. Shure, here’s the quality comin’. Be off wid ye!”

“I want to see—I want to see—I will see,” in ever-rising notes of shrillness, as the carriage drove rapidly by.

For an instant a proud, lovely face flashed by in the sunlight. Eyes supremely scornful, supremely cold, rested on the two figures leaning over the broken railings—one grey and wrinkled with a broken-down hat and a pipe to match, the other young with childhood’s matchless youth—a face glowing with vivid life between a mass of tangled elf locks—all else rags and dirt that matched her companion.

Then the carriage rolled on, and the eager curiosity left behind exploded into a hundred questions.

“Who is she, gran’father? Wasn’t she beautiful intirely? An’ the grand dress av her! Oh! I wish Biddy had seen her. Is it living at the big house she’ll be? Why hasn’t she iver been here before?”

“Ah, child, divil take yer tongue,” was the impatient though not ill-humored answer. “Ye’ve as many questions on it as ’ud puzzle the Pope of Rome. Who is she ye wants to know. She’s Mr. Marsden’s daughter—the one that made the grand marriage two years ago—an’ lives in London, where the Quane is. Now are ye satisfied?”

“Who is the Quane?” asked the child.

“She’s a mighty grand person who owns all av this country an’ a power o’ others—an’ has never done us a haporth av good in her life,” was the comprehensive answer. “I wish we had the chance o’ seeing her, an’ tellin’ her a bit o’ our

minds—but faith, she's too afraid of plain spakin' to vinture within a hundred miles av an Irish tongue. 'Tis only foreigners they say can plaize her. She's been actin' dog in the manger with poor ould Ireland these fifty years an' more. She'll not do anything for it herself, nor let us do anything for it widout her!"

"Ah! niver mind about her!" exclaimed the child pettishly. "Tell me more about the beautiful lady an' the big house yonder. It didn't always belong to Mr. Marsden, did it?"

"Belong, is it? Shure the rightful owner is as poor as the best av us now. Belong? No; the dacent gentleman had mortgaged ivery acre av it an' thin the whole property was bought by Mr. Marsden. He came here wid his wife. A fine handsome lady she was, too,—an' the fine family she had, but shure they're all dead or turned out bad. Divil a bit o' luck the place brought him, an' sarve him right!"

"Why, what harm did he do?" asked the child's logical brain. "If the other man had no money 'twas very kind of Mr. Marsden to buy his property from him."

"Much ye know about it. To be pratin' o' rights an' wrongs at yer age. Git in wid ye now, an' see to the praties; Biddy 'll be home soon, an' wantin' her supper maybe."

The child turned reluctantly into the wretched cottage. The sunset had faded, the sky was growing dim. The carriage had long since disappeared. She went about the preparation for the evening meal with even more than her usual dislike for the sordid surroundings and poverty-stricken fare that made up the sum total of her life. She had never known anything else but poverty, nor any surroundings that were not sordid.

A tattered, wild-looking, mischievous elf—parentless, so she had been told—unloved save by one kind womanly heart—the heart of Biddy Maguire. Such was the station in life in which Providence had seen fit to place "Kitty the Rag."

That had been her nickname ever since she could remember, as characteristic of herself as most Irish pseudonyms are. For she was but a rag—a mass of tatters, bare-footed, bare-headed—with the wild beauty of face and eyes obliterated by dirt—and instincts for ever battling with her surroundings.

Yet she was not unhappy. Few children are who have liberty of action, even though it may be combined with scanty fare and the manifold hardships of poverty.

Her nature was one of sturdy independence that gave promise

of future strength—the strength of womanhood, unsheltered by aught but its own instincts. There was little softness or affection in it. She loved but two living creatures in her world of humanity. One was a half-blind cur she had once rescued, the other was the woman who had adopted her. She was known throughout the district as “Biddy, the dalin’ woman.” Biddy was a character in her way. She gained her own livelihood and kept an idle husband with strong political opinions by attending auctions and buying all manner of odd but generally useful articles, which she sold again to the neighbors or country-side at a small profit. She was keen witted, thrifty and honest. Warm hearted and warm tempered, like most of her race, she asked but little of life, and it gave it her generously, and reaped in return such measure of gratitude as few of its more prosperous children deign to bestow.

She had had but one child, a son, and had idolized him somewhat too idolatrously for his own good. He had been well educated, and was a great favorite with the priest, Father Dillon, by reason of his quickness, his handsome face and beautiful voice. This voice had been of inestimable value on saints’ days and festivals, and the music of the little chapel had never been so well organized or performed as when handsome Eugene Maguire had lent his voice and talent to its service. There had been great surprise and talk in the village when the said handsome Eugene had suddenly gone off to America.

His mother was singularly reticent on the subject. She affirmed it was for “his good,” and she appeared to have no difficulty in the matter of passage money, or outfit. In any case Eugene went off with scant time for leave-taking, and in company with Father Dillon, who took him to Queenstown and saw him off in the mail boat. He had been away eight years, and his mother’s beautiful brown hair had whitened strangely; and his father was still idle and discontented, and the enemy of wealthy landowners and such stewards and agents as have the agreeable duty appointed them of collecting rents from Irish peasantry.

He had a cottage, a small garden, and a fair-sized potato plot. He was, according to his neighbors, fairly well off, but no one ever heard a thankful word from his lips.

He had one endless grievance. In one of her dalin’ expeditions Biddy had come across a poor girl dying, so she said, with a babe at her breast. She had been deceived and deserted, and was paying the penalty of the “Cigale’s” brief summer.

Biddy brought the child home, and reared it and tended it with such love and care as she might have lavished on her own. To her husband's grumbling she paid no heed. She made money enough to feed the extra mouth, so she said, and that being an undeniable fact the idle loafer had to content himself with ill-treating the child during her unavoidable absences, and encouraging a tendency for dirt, and a perfect genius for the destruction of garments, that used to drive poor Biddy to despair when she came home again.

The odd bundles and parcels with which she would be laden were always a source of delight to the child. She would ransack them for flimsy bits of lace and ribbon, old artificial flowers, faded odds and ends of discarded finery with which to deck herself out—and thus attired would parade the street, to the delight and envy of the other children. Their only revenge was to call her by the nickname of her babyhood, and at last she grew up quite proud of the title, and refused to be known by any other.

On this eventful evening, when the arrival of a visitor had inflamed her curiosity so strangely, she was expecting Biddy back with unusual impatience. The gift of a frock had been promised her if she would keep the cottage tidy and refrain from the usual process of "shredding" her own garments.

The cottage was certainly clean. She had thrown pails of water over the brick floor, and polished up the chairs and table, and washed the few plates and cups, and scoured the two saucepans and the kettle which made up the sum of kitchen utensils.

As for herself, she had entirely forgotten the necessity for "clainin' up" under the stress of this wonderful event at the big house. She was as dirty and as ragged as any urchin in the place; but for once Biddy seemed to have no eyes for that as she folded her to her warm womanly heart, and kissed the ruddy mouth and brown soft cheeks again and again.

"It was just hungerin' for ye I was, darlin'," she cried passionately, as she at last released her. "'Twas a long week, an' a long tramp—though I'm not the one to be complainin', thank the Lord, for a tidy bargain I've made, and a gould sovereign here, all profit—an' faith, 'tisn't many can say that same these hard bad times."

Then they sat down to potatoes and tea, and a red herring for Maguire himself, and she related the history of her travels and the last auction, in the picturesque and forcible style of her class.

Kitty listened impatiently; she only wanted her frock, and it seemed as if supper would never come to an end. But at last the plates were cleared, and the last potato finished. Then came the delightful moment when the bundle was opened and its heterogeneous contents, for which neither market nor customer had been found, were poured out on the cottage floor. Nothing was too extraordinary or too useless for the Dalin' Woman to purchase. Old ties, medical books, scraps of finery, discarded table napery, old boots and shoes, pewter spoons and plates, odd gloves, cutlery, battered novels, suits of clothes, these and countless other articles were poured out on the floor. Among them all was one gleaming bit of color that caught the child's eye. She made a pounce at it and dragged it forth, and then stood staring, enraptured at the treasure.

"Yes, honey, 'tis that same," said Biddy. "The frock I promised ye. Shure it's fit for a lady of the county, it is. A trifle large for ye I'm thinkin', darlin', but none the worse for that, seeing ye're a fast growing colleen. An' ye'll jist clean yer face an' hands, an' tidy yer hair a bit, we'll put it on ye an' see how it looks."

The child flew off to perform her ablutions with wonderful zeal, and still more wonderful results.

Soap and water left revealed a face and throat beautiful as one of Murillo's famed cherubs—the hard and vigorous application of a brush out of the dalin' woman's store of luxuries showed a mass of gold brown hair, waving and shimmering round her shoulders, instead of hanging in tangled strands as usual.

Then Biddy arrayed her in the scarlet frock which was after all a fairly good fit. It hung in straight loose folds fitted into a square yoke of velvet of the same color. The velvet was worn and shabby, the cashmere stained and marked, but in the evening light and the glow of the embers from the open hearth, these defects were not visible. Biddy surveyed her with unconcealed pride that second-hand possessions had no power to chill.

The child listened impatiently. She was eager to be out of doors, and try the effect of her dazzling appearance on her compeers round about. When Biddy had grown tired of admiring the frock she wanted to remove it, but her efforts were the signal for rebellion, and the child firmly resisted her persuasions. Finally she made a spring from detaining hands, and reached the door. There she paused a moment—the hues

of saffron from the sky beyond mingling with the scarlet glow of the loose folds that fluttered round her. So brilliant a picture she made that the dalin' woman remained transfixed, gazing at her half in rapture, half in fear.

Then an elfish laugh escaped the mocking lips, and the paling sunset shone through an open doorway.

Biddy sighed. Then she returned to her purchases, sorting out such articles as were likely to be of use to her neighbors, and adding the useless odds and ends to a store which formed the collection of years, and clamored for an auction of its own.

Meanwhile the child flew down the village street like a brilliant meteor, creating a sensation such as she had never dreamt of. But she had no mind to stay even for admiration. She had an object in view, and to achieve it was her present intent. With swift, unheeding feet she flew on and on, deaf alike to questions or entreaties.

She reached the end of the village street, and came to where a road ran between high hedgerows, growing faintly dusk now, as the lingering day paled into shadowy twilight.

For a moment she paused. The road looked so long, the screening boughs were so heavy; no living thing was visible anywhere, nor any sound to be heard save the faint twitter of some wandering bird.

The child drew a deep breath.

Then she resumed her rapid run. The road branched off at last. It followed a curving line past a series of fields where the corn was breast high. Then came a copse full of rustling sounds of birds' wings or speeding rabbits, and beyond that were the boundaries of miles of iron fencing backed by a hedge carefully kept and revelling in the luxuriance of summer's newly given treasures.

The child paused.

Ingress and exit were alike made difficult here, and intruders were warned by perpetual notice boards of penalties incurred. Unpopularity has no defence save the fears it can enforce, and Philip Marsden was certainly unpopular. His very justice and strictness and straight dealing made him so.

The Irish path of reasoning is decidedly a crooked one, and to a sense of virtue the imputation of "trespassing" is practically unjustifiable.

The child had never in her life paid the least attention to notice boards or proprietary fences. She had not the slightest intention of making an exception to her rule as yet.

By dint of squeezing and climbing and doing considerable damage to the hedge and herself, she worked her way into the park, and from thence to the terrace facing the great white stone building that was the goal of her evening's expedition.

She crept along, shielding herself from observation by means of shrubs or bushes or the large terrace urns that held such wealth of fragrance and color.

Suddenly she came in view of a row of windows; within were numerous lights. The blinds were not down, and she saw a large room full of beautiful and wonderful things. A table spread with dazzling damask and glass and silver, the glow of wax candles shedding a soft brilliance over flowers and fruit. At this table were seated a man and a woman.

She had eyes only for the woman. For the proud pale face and dark gleaming eyes, for the lovely head crowned by a wealth of chestnut hair, for the glowing jewels on the white throat, the lustre of satin from the splendid gown trailing like a gleam of moonlight over the rich-hued carpet.

Nearer and nearer crept the intruder. The color came and went in her face like a flame blown by a passing breath. Her eyes, dark as deep waters, gazed absorbedly at the scene before her. The rich appointments of the room, the liveries of the servants, the cold hard face of the master of it all, the proud indifference of the beautiful woman.

Every bit of color, every atom of detail seemed to set itself in the child's mind as bits of mosaic in a pattern they form. She felt it as one feels a picture—she envied it with a sudden passionate envy that struck the keynote of discontent.

“Why are these people fortunate and not I?”

It is the cry of an enduring and unfortunate humanity to its wealthier and less deserving brotherhood.

It was the cry that stirred to birth this childish, untutored soul, and with that cry a throbbing, torturing personality leaped into life in place of the waif and stray of poverty who had known herself only, up to that moment, as “Kitty the Rag.”

CHAPTER II.

THE footman and butler had withdrawn. Father and daughter faced each other. It was the first time for two years they had been alone.

Though totally unlike in appearance, there was a curious likeness of expression in the two faces. Both had that look of intense pride—that over-cultured delicacy of refined senses—that half scornful, half weary curl of lip—that listless grace of movement.

The man had passed middle age by a decade. The woman was in the very prime and zenith of womanly beauty.

He was watching her intently. There had always been a trace of antagonism in their relationship. She never remembered having met with sympathy or consideration at his hands. He was a man of superficially cultured mind, keen intelligence, and refined selfishness. He had none of that large comprehension for the sufferings of others that makes a beautiful nature also a lovable one.

His charity was a thing of necessity, enforced by a certain position and recognized wealth. It brought him no gratitude in return, and no increase of popularity. People often wondered why he had chosen to settle in Ireland, but he never gave any reason for the whim, and he was not an easy man to question.

He watched her peeling a peach with those white taper fingers so like his own.

“You will find it very dull here, Hermia,” he said at last.

“It will be a change,” she said coldly. She did not look up; she finished peeling the fruit and commenced to eat it.

“You still appreciate the charms of contrast, then?”

“I suppose so,” she said. “I am sick of a bedizened society. I know its every trick, its every pretence. I remembered there was a pulse of real life beating here, in this remote Irish village. I felt I should like to hear that beat, to get some fresh pure air, after the stifling horrors of London and Paris.”

“You will get the breath of pigsties,” he said in a curious

voice. "But I thought you had lost your taste for them long ago."

A flush, hot and painful, seemed to burn her cheek for a second's space. The slender fingers closed on the delicate silver knife she held.

"I think," she said hoarsely, "you might spare me—that."

"Ah! my dear Hermia," he answered, "you can hardly expect me to believe you are very sensitive. But I will not hint at bygones if you are offended. I will only say that after having cast off the dust of this 'happy isle' from your shoes two years ago, with a declaration that you would never return to it, I was surprised to get a letter proposing a visit—by yourself."

"Lord Ellingsworth will be here next week," she said quietly.

"Oh! And how long do you propose remaining?"

"I don't know," she said wearily. "Till the end of the month, perhaps; unless you are tired of us."

"It is the first time you have honored my roof since your marriage," he said. "I could scarcely be wearied of you in three weeks."

He paused, but she made no response.

"I was wondering," he went on presently as he sipped his Chambertin, "why you chose this time of the year. There will be nothing for Ellingsworth to do—no hunting—no shooting."

Her delicate brows drew together in a swift frown.

"Is it quite impossible," she said petulantly, "for a man to exist two weeks in the country without having something to kill?"

"In the country—yes. That is why sport is so moral, and idleness so dangerous."

"Ellingsworth is quite safe," she said with a scornful curl of the beautiful lips. "His morality will be proof even against a dearth of bloodshed—and an absence of clubs."

"Is he still so devoted—and after two years?"

Again that hot flush dyed her face.

"It is a humiliating confession," she said, "but he is. I can imagine you don't credit it. You were never a believer in conjugal fidelity."

It was his turn to wince now under the steady challenge of those mocking eyes.

"I had good reason not to be," he said bitterly.

"I think," she said quietly, "that your lot was a remarkably fortunate one. Of course one can only judge by comparison."

"It would be better to judge by results," he answered.

"I noticed you have made many more improvements here," she said presently, as she laid down the dessert knife, and leant back in her chair.

"It is never-ending work to improve this property," he said impatiently. "And one gets no gratitude and little return."

She half smiled. "The Irish want a lot of understanding," she said. "I think my mother told you *that* when you first resolved on coming here."

He frowned darkly.

"They may understand each other," he said harshly. "I defy any other nation on God's earth to comprehend them."

"That seems to say that there is still one country on the civilized globe where man retains his primitive savage virtues, and can afford to laugh at the orthodox civilized vices," she answered.

"Of course," he said. "I know your sympathies are all on their side. They always were. But however admirable in theory, they would be somewhat irksome to practice. If you once allowed a tenant to prey on your compassion he would simply smoke his pipe, let his ground take care of itself, and allow you the privilege of keeping his family and himself on the condition that you never claimed your rent in return."

"I can't agree with you," she said. "They are malleable enough if you go the right way to work."

"You have found them so I have no doubt," he answered, with that scorn she hated on his thin lips.

"Would it not be better, father," she said abruptly, "to drop the past altogether out of our discussion? It is not a pleasant memory for either of us. You exacted heavy payment from me, and I gave it you. I have never complained. I never shall complain. I won't even remind you that the love and sympathy of home life were almost unknown to me at the very crisis when a girl's life most needs such things. Can't you be generous enough to forgive—to seem to forget? You know I have carried out my part of the bargain to the letter."

She rose as she finished speaking, and stood with one hand resting lightly on the chair, her splendid figure and her beau-

tiful face outlined against the dusky background of damask draperies and closing night.

For a moment he looked at her keenly—steadily.

There was but one thought in his mind—"If she were not so like her mother; if I knew—if I were *sure*."

As one drop of aconite embitters a glass of water, so one thought of jealousy poisons a human heart.

Long brooding over a fancied wrong had so poisoned the heart of Philip Marsden. His wife had died unforgiven for such a fancied wrong. His daughter stood for ever in his sight as a further transgression.

Of pity or of pardon he was alike incapable.

Seeing he made no answer she moved slowly away to the door. He rose and opened it. For one instant their eyes met; she half extended her hand.

"Oh, father, let it be peace!" she cried impulsively. "I have fulfilled my part of the compact; have I not?"

"Yes," he said, "you have done all you promised. Let it be—peace!"

But he did not seem to notice the outstretched hand, and there was more mockery than courtesy in the bow with which he drew back, and let her pass into the hall beyond.

Then he closed the door on her trailing skirts and sat down once more to his wine—and his reflections.

A face pressed against the window frame withdrew silently as the door closed. A flash of crimson shone for a moment in the clear lustre of the risen moon. Then silently and softly, as she had come, the child sped homewards.

Biddy was standing at the cottage door, looking anxiously up and down the road, when she at last came in sight. A storm of questions and reproaches greeted her.

"And himself gone to bed this hour an' more," concluded Biddy. "Shure, child, it's lost intirely I thought ye were! Where did ye go to at all?"

"To the big house yonder," said the child slowly.

She was tired and pale, but her eyes glowed feverishly, her face had a strange, set look.

"Biddy," she said, drawing a wooden stool up to the still smouldering turf in the fireplace, "I want to talk to you. I want you to tell me something. I'm glad he's gone to bed. Now sit there"—she pointed to the old wooden settle—"and listen."

The old woman did as she was bid. She leant forward, her

arms folded in the skirt of her gown, and watched the grave puzzled face before her with a worshipping adoration, almost painful in its intensity.

"Biddy, I've seen the beautiful lady again. She's come back."

"Thru for ye. I heard that. It's staying with her father she is," answered Biddy.

"I went to see her," continued the child. "I got into the grounds, and looked through the window. Oh, Biddy, it was all so grand, so beautiful, and she—she just sat there as if she cared nothing for it at all, and jewels shining on her neck, and her dress like silver it was, all trailing about her. Biddy, why aren't we rich like that?"

"Ah, the Lord save ye, child. What are ye talkin' of? Shure there's always rich and poor—the quality and the beggars. 'Tisn't for the likes o' us to be askin' why, darlin'. It's Life as the blessed Lord mint it to be—and don't ye be gettin' notions o' that sort into yer head, for sorra a bit o' good will they do ye."

"All sorts of things come and go in my head," said the child wistfully. "I hate being poor, Biddy. I want to be like that lady—I want to have a beautiful house, and jewels, and servants, and satin gowns, and——"

"Ah, glory be to God! What are ye talkin' like that for? It's a sin for ye, child, and ye've no call to do it. Shure, ye've niver wanted the bit nor sup since ye came here—an' 'tis me heart's blood I'd give to make ye happy. Riches is mighty decavin', child. Niver ye be cravin' for them. Doesn't Father Dillon say that they're at the bottom of all the crimes an' all the sins in the wurld?"

"Biddy," broke in the peremptory voice again, "whose child am I?"

The dalin' woman's face turned ghastly even under its tan of sun and wind.

"In the name o' goodness why do ye ask that?" she said huskily.

"I know I'm not yours," Kitty went on. "The neighbors say you found me and brought me here out of kindness. Who was my mother? Do you know?"

"The saints presarve us! How did ye come to be thinkin' sich things, Kitty agra? 'Tis surely bewitched ye are!"

"You don't answer me, Biddy. Ah! you must. Who was my mother? Is she dead?"

"She is dead—to you, darlin'. Ah, don't be draggin' the story out of me wid thim pladin' eyes. I'll tell ye it straight an' thru some day. But not now. Ye wudn't understand it now, darlin'."

The child drew a deep breath. "Some day! That's no time at all. Ah, Biddy, and I want to learn—I want to go to school—I want to be a lady. I can't wait. I must know."

Biddy shook her head. "I've sworn solemnly not to tell," she said. "I can't break my oath, darlin'. Ye must contint yerself as ye are."

"I won't—I can't. I shall run away!" cried the child tempestuously.

"Is it breakin' my heart ye'd be?" exclaimed the old woman sorrowfully. "Shure, child, an oath's an oath, and I've never broken my word yet for man or woman—for praste or penance. Can't ye contint yerself as ye are? I never thought ye were unhappy."

"I am! I always am! I hate this dirty hole. I hate the children. I hate being called what they call me!"

She burst into passionate sobs—into a storm of rage, envy, and invective that fairly startled Biddy. Long repression was taking vengeance at last. The starved nature had awakened to a knowledge of its own desires, and the poor trembling woman who had only love to give recognized how valueless and poor a gift it seems to youth's selfish exactions.

Paler and paler she grew. Her heart was trying to frame a resolve that meant death to cherished hopes; the renunciation of all life's joy.

When the sobs had ceased at last, she drew the exhausted child to her bosom.

"Whisht ye now, dearie . . . don't be after frettin' any more. Shure what does Biddy live for but yer happiness? If she can't give it ye, she must get it for ye. . . . 'Tis a hard task ye've set me, darlin'—but shure I'm not the one to flinch from it. Now go to bed, and slape, and the saints comfort ye. I'll just have a quiet think over a pipe, and maybe in the mornin' there'll be some gran' news for ye, mavourneen."

The child was weary with her long tramp and her recent outburst of passion. She passively submitted to the removal of the new frock, and then went up to her little straw mattress in the loft above, and curled herself up, and was fast asleep long ere Biddy's pipe had ceased to glow in the dark little kitchen.

Meanwhile the Dalin' Woman sat on and on, her eyes on the dull embers, her mind one great sea of perplexed and troubled thoughts, in which she vainly tried to steer the bark of a decision.

"What's put it in the craythur's head at all, at all?" she muttered. "Shure it's in the blood, it must be, an' neither praste nor holy water can purge it out. An' me thinkin' 'twould be aisey enough to order the life av her. Ah, glory be to God! 'tis mighty strange we are—mighty strange, an' one's one thing, an' one's another. Ah, Kitty, child, 'twasn't for this I bargained whin I brought ye here—'twas only of yer father's blood I was thinkin' . . . an' that 'twas his child ye were . . . an' the surprise av him, an' the pride too, maybe, whin he should come back to the ould counthry agin. Eight years—eight years. It's a long time to be widout a word or sign. . . . Ah, 'twas God made us mothers, knowin' we'd have a power o' sufferin' to go through, but the Blessed Virgin maybe gave us the patience to bear it."

She removed the pipe and laid it down on her lap.

There were tears in her eyes, and they rolled slowly down the brown sun tanned face and fell unheeded on the upturned bowl.

"'Twill wring the heart o' me intirely," she went on. "Ah, the miss o' that bright face, an' the purty voice, an' that orderin', masterful way av her! But if it's the blood spakin' sure 'tis no use goin' agin it. I'll jist go straight away to the big house yonder to-morrow an' have a word wid the master himself. He's a hard man—may heaven forgive him!—but maybe he'll give me a hearin' an' the price o' the schoolin' she wants, an' thin she'll be contint. She's that sharp an' that clever 'twasn't to be expicted as how she'd stay here an' larn nothing; jist satisfyin' herself wid dirt an' fun an' divilry like the other children, an' it's hard on her whin I'm away an' only Jim to mind her. 'Twould be different altogether av I could stay an' care for her me own self. Maybe thin she wouldn't be wantin' to lave me, an' fill her purty head wid larnin' an' scholarship an' sich like."

She wiped away the tears, and rose and softly make her way to where the child lay sleeping. Then as softly fell on her knees and poured out her simple soul in passionate entreaties for her welfare and happiness.

"She'll niver know a mother on earth, O Blessed Mary.

Be good to her. Oh, be good to her for the sake av yer own most blessed Son."

So ran her prayer, uttered in all the simplicity of a fervent faith that, believing all, accepted all as possible, and took up life's burden with none of the weight of responsibility that the wise man and the doubter know.

CHAPTER III.

"TELL her I can't see her. I'm engaged. I'm busy. What's the use of bringing me these messages, Garry? You know my rules."

Philip Marsden spoke fretfully—impatiently. He was in the library, enjoying the morning papers and a peculiarly fine cigar. He did not choose to be disturbed by begging petitions or tales of misfortune that threatened postponement of rents.

The man stood holding the door handle apologetically.

"Your pardon, sir, but she said that if you knew she was Mrs. Maguire—we always call her the Dalin' Woman——"

Mr. Marsden started ever so slightly.

"Maguire," he said slowly. "Is she the wife of that idle vagabond who's letting his ground go to rack and ruin while he talks Home Rule and Socialism in the public house?"

"She is, sir. But she's a decent, respectable creature enough. It's not her fault that she's got a bad husband."

"I'll see her," said Philip Marsden suddenly. "Show her in."

There was a curious glitter in his steel grey eyes. He leant back in his chair and waited; his attitude expectant, his face calm, and set as a mask.

In a few moments Garry reappeared, ushering in Biddy Maguire, neatly dressed in black, a Paisley shawl draping her shoulders despite the warmth of the fine day.

She dropped a curtsy and then stood looking half wonderingly at the beautiful and luxurious appointments of the room.

"Well?" said Philip Marsden sharply. "May I ask what is your business?"

"Maybe you'll remember me, sir?" she said quietly. "You'll remember askin' me to do ye a sarvice——"

"I might know by this time," he said coldly, "that to ask any Irish person to do you a service is to burden yourself with a perpetual obligation. But of course I know to what you allude. I paid you well."

"You did, sir. I'm not ungrateful. It's not to remind you of meself I'm come. It's to ask your favor for—for some one else."

"If it's for your good-for-nothing husband you are wasting your time and mine to no purpose."

"Jim, is it? Shure, sir, I'm not reduced to axin' anything from anybody's hands for him either."

"Then perhaps you'll tell me what it is you want."

"I want you to do an act of kindness for—for a child I've the care of, sir. To pay for a bit o' schoolin' and better bringin' up than I can give her. The saints know she's welcome to all I have, but I've to work hard, sir, and I'm only a poor woman, and Jim, he's not much ov a help."

Mr. Marsden laughed scornfully.

"It's a pretty cool request," he said. "May I ask why I should interest myself in any child—or grandchild, I suppose it must be—of yours, Mrs. Maguire?"

"You've spoken the truth, sir; it's my grandchild I'm pleadin' for, though not a sowl knows it, even my own husband."

"And why am I favored with this secret?"

"You use a power o' grand words, sir, and a poor woman like me isn't much of a scholar. But I think you ought to know who the child is as well as I do, Mr. Marsden."

Their eyes met. A keen searching look seemed to flash from soul to soul.

He took the cigar from between his lips, flicked off the ash with one delicate finger, then replaced it.

"Will you answer me a few questions?" he said.

"Truth and I will, sir. It's for that I'm here."

"To begin with. You rendered me a certain service some years ago, nine or ten I believe. I paid you for it handsomely, on a certain condition."

"The condition you might have made for a litter of pups or a breed of kittens, sir. Drown them, get rid of them, don't let me hear or see 'em again. But a little human soul can't be treated like a kitten. It made its struggle for life, and it lived."

His brows drew darkly together. "You mean to tell me that child is alive?"

"'Tis Gospel truth, sir, as I'm an honest woman."

"And you have taken charge of it?"

"I have, sir. Now perhaps you'll be after understandin' what I said about schoolin', and the better housing of her. Blood will spake out, Mr. Marsden, there's no denying it; and 'tisn't in her nature to be contint with what I can give

her. Shure 'tis a poor home enough. But I'm not unthankful."

Her eyes turned to the luxurious appointments of this room, with its mixture of Sybarite ease and artistic fitness.

"I'm not askin' for much, sir," she said.

"No," he said thoughtfully. "I was not debating the magnitude of your demand, only its consequences."

She was silent. Her lips quivered nervously, her arms rolled themselves in the folds of the shawl, and then fell back to her side, as befitting one's manners in presence of the quality. She was waiting for one question to be put. But he did not desire, or did not intend, to put it.

He drew a long breath and threw away the remains of the cigar. It had lost its flavor now.

"I will do what you wish," he said abruptly.

"The Lord reward ye, sir," she said. "I thought your heart wasn't altogether cowld, as they say."

"Be silent," he exclaimed fiercely. "I am doing this, not because you ask me, not because I feel any claim on me to do it—simply for a reason of my own. The child is not to know. I will select a place for her—probably abroad."

A faint cry cut short his words.

"In furrin parts! Oh, not that, for the love o' heaven, Mr. Marsden. Shure, 'twould brake the heart o' me intirely. What would I do widout a sight ov her at all, at all?"

He held up one hand. "My good woman," he said, "understand once for all, that if I interfere in this matter I do it in my own way. I allow of no dictation as to the mode of my actions. You desire to change the whole method of this child's life. You say she is not at one with her surroundings. I agree to give her a different life—an education that will help her to make her way in a world that will probably be never too kind to her. The case is quite simple and perfectly clear."

"But you'll let me see her sometimes, sir. You won't be so cruel. Shure, she's all in the livin' world I've got to love. I've lost me boy, the pride o' me heart——"

"Silence!" he thundered. "Don't mention his name. How dare you breathe it here?"

Her face blanched to a hue of terror.

"Ah, glory be to God, what was I thinkin' ov at all?" she muttered. The big tears rolled down her cheeks. She looked appealingly at him. The whole expression of his

face had altered. It was full of repressed fury, of scorn, horror, rage. The delicate hand clenched on the pile of papers by his side so that the knuckles stood out white and strained.

"Remember your oath," he said fiercely. "You forget how much lies in my power."

She bent her head. A shiver shook her. "I ax your pardon, sir. 'Twas a slip ov the tongue."

He regained his previous composure and resumed. "For the next three weeks," he said, "I have visitors staying with me. After that I will communicate with you. Meanwhile, if you need any——"

His hand strayed to his pocket. She stopped him by an imperative gesture.

"No, sir; thank you kindly, but it's not beggin' I am; only askin' for a right."

He rose abruptly. "I have only your word," he said, "that this is the same child."

The flash of scorn in her eyes shamed the suspicion.

"You have, sir. It's as good a word as any man or woman's in all Kerry. If you doubt it, ye've but to look at Kitty's face. Heaven bless her! 'Tis writ there, plain as print, Mr. Marsden, who was the mother ov her."

He changed color slightly. "She believes it died," he said very low.

"Thru for ye, she does, sor. Never a bit would I undecave her. But 'twas the poor colleen who had charge."

"She must always believe it," he said, looking strangely at the woman's tanned and honest face. "Remember that; *she must always believe it.*"

"Ye may trust me, Mr. Marsden. I suppose ye know best. 'Twon't be from my lips that that story will iver be heard."

"Then you can go home now and wait to hear from me. One word—tell the child as little as possible, and if for the next few weeks you can take her out of this neighborhood, so much the better. You understand?"

"Shure, sir, 't isn't an Irishwoman that needs tellin' the manin' ov a hint, though I've heerd o' folks as are too honest to take one. But I'm not one o' thim, thank the Lord. You'll not be throubled with a sight ov her. I've a bit of business will take me down to the coast, and Kitty will be only too plazed to bear me company."

“You are sure,” he said, “you need no assistance?”

“When I do, sir, I’ll ax for it. ’Tisn’t to say that Biddy the Dalin’ Woman is no better than the Red Hen or the Foreign Rushes! Good-mornin’, sir, I’ll wait your pleasure.”

“Good-morning, and remember, a silent tongue is better than a priest’s blessing. Tell no one your business.”

She curtsied low and went out.

He resumed his seat, but the papers seemed powerless to interest him. A chapter of human life lay before him. He turned over its pages with slow and steady memory. Darker and darker grew his face, more ominous the frown that drew his fine straight brows together.

“Am I wise to do this?” he asked himself. “Or will she serve my purpose? ‘Nobody’s blessing is every one’s curse,’ they say. Heaven knows a more undesired and undesirable being never thrust herself into the net of a triple destiny. ‘Every one’s curse’—will she be that?”

A figure passed along the terrace, walking with a certain weary grace, as if the exercise were a thing of duty, not a pleasure born of soft air that was filled with flower-scents of bounteous June. She seemed heedless of the green and gold of trees and sunlight—the beauty of a scene unrivalled even where beautiful scenes abounded. Philip Marsden watched her keenly.

“She does not look happy,” he said to himself. “What odd creatures women are. Beauty, rank, wealth—she has them all. What more should one of her sex ask of life?”

The white gown, severely simple, yet costly as many a more showy one, passed out of sight. He saw it gleam for a moment against the iron railings dividing lawn and park, then it disappeared among the trees, and he went back to his occupation of reading the previous day’s London news in a Dublin paper—one of the defects of country life which electricity and steam have not yet abolished.

CHAPTER IV.

"I HAVE asked Kilmayne and his wife to dine here this evening," said Mr. Marsden to his daughter when they met at luncheon. "He is a harmless fool, but she is amusing. You will get all the news of the district in five minutes, and I know you don't object to brogue."

"I thought you did," she answered, as she took a chicken cutlet from the dish handed to her.

"Oh, now and then it serves its purpose," he answered. "It reminds me of where I live and my responsibilities. Where did you go this morning?"

"Only through the park. It was too hot to forsake the trees. I see you have built a new lodge. Who lives there?"

"A *protégée* of Mrs. Kilmayne's—a widow. She seems very quiet and respectable. She's a Maguire. The place is overrun with Maguires. There seems no end to them."

"They are a good family, and once were landowners here," she said, in a somewhat strained voice.

Her eyes were on her plate, but for a moment she saw nothing. Her thoughts were back in the past. A boy's face—a boy's laughing eyes—seemed to have sprung up in the sunshine of the room. Together they were wading knee-deep in scented grass—tossing the hay aloft with bare brown arms. She was playing peasant maid to please him. The summer was theirs, and freedom, and the gladness of heedless youth.

A voice recalled her suddenly.

"They say so, but improvidence and imprudence have generally a legendary history to fall back upon. The Maguires are no exception."

She was silent.

"I think," he said presently, "that Ellingsworth has never been to Ireland, has he?"

"No."

"Ah! it will be quite a new study for him. I shouldn't advise him, however, to invest any spare cash in property here. I have never ceased to regret it."

She waited until the servant withdrew, and then answered

that speech. "You seem to forget, father," she said, "that this property was bought with my mother's money, that it has proved a most valuable investment, and has brought you wealth such as you little dreamed of. Abuse Ireland and the Irish as you may, at least your own country never served you so well."

"How warm you always get on that point," he said with his faint sneer; "I am thankful I am not patriotic. It must be terribly wearying to have one's feelings set against one's sense of justice. The faint leaven of Irish descent you draw from your mother seems to have veritably leavened your whole nature, Hermia."

"I am glad of it," she said, her cheeks flushing brightly. "I am prouder of my Irish descent than if I sprang from the tainted nobility of your country."

"We always fight over that point," he said coldly. "It is the one thing that in your childhood struck me as remarkable—your extreme partiality for the land of your birth. I must say I have failed in detecting any specially great virtues in the Irish character—save a reckless generosity that is its own worst enemy, a pride that is both foolish and unreasoning, and a general idea of putting off till to-morrow everything that comes under the head of 'a duty' for to-day."

She was silent, but he saw her lips quiver. He knew that she was putting herself under strong restraint.

"How is Dr. Carrick?" she asked suddenly. "You have not mentioned him."

"He is quite well. He comes in for a game of chess now and then in the evenings. I can't well refuse him the boon of my society. That is one of the penalties of college friendships. We are quite apart in our sympathies, our opinions, but men always seem to fancy the intimacies of youth justify them in exacting the appearance of amity in after life."

"I often think," she said abruptly, "that you could never have cared for any human being—man or woman—in your life!"

"Perhaps," he said, "you are right. I object to be the slave of any weakness. To allow feeling to dominate one is a very unwise proceeding. I have been twenty years teaching that fact to my tenants. I think they are just beginning to comprehend it. The advantage of the precept speaks for itself. My rents are never in arrear. They know excuses are useless. I never listen to them."

She looked at him, a sudden fire slumbering in her great

dark eyes. "I wonder," she said, "you are not afraid sometimes."

"I? Oh, no. Why should I be? I have taken precautions for my own safety. I have also read them one or two sharp lessons. Believe me, the demagogue is always a coward as well as a ruffian. He loves bluster, but he loves his own skin better. Besides, there is really a little creditable pride in having one Irish property as a show place, and certainly Knockrea serves that purpose. Lord Dunsane can't boast of such farms and such cattle as I can show. He always tells me he envies me."

"But he takes no interest in the country. He is scarcely ever here," she said.

"And I am, you mean? Well, I've had a good business education, and I've learnt that what you want done satisfactorily you had best do yourself."

She rose at last. "If the Kilmaynes are coming to-night," she said, "would you object to my inviting the doctor also? We were always great friends, you know."

"Of course, ask him if you wish. Are you going to drive this afternoon?"

"I thought of the pony carriage."

"I have given that up. You can have the landau, or dog-cart."

"Very well," she said listlessly. "Only I should have preferred to drive myself."

She left the room, and, hurrying up the broad oak staircase, crossed the richly carpeted corridor to her own rooms.

The window stood open. The hot sun was screened by outside blinds. She threw herself down on a chair by the broad-cushioned window-seat, and resting her arms there looked out at the magnificent view spread before her—at the beautiful park, the broad terrace, the parterres of flowers; at the far-off gleam of the lake, where snowy swans were gliding under the bending willow boughs, and far on, as far as eye could reach, spread farm lands, cultured to the perfection of farming, ripening grain, silvery oats, rich grazing land. How she loved every acre of this place, every curve of the swelling hills, every bend of the green valleys nestling under their sheltering arms. It would be all hers some day, so her mother had used to say. All hers—the only child born on Irish soil—the only one who had survived of all the puny crew who had once lived under this roof. Her thoughts flew back to childhood—to

youth—to mingled joys and sorrows—to the gradual lessening of the home circle—to the perpetual strife between father and mother that had so perplexed and saddened her—to loneliness and neglect, and a sweet brief gleam of gladness, crushed out for ever by an iron hand—her father's hand.

How strange it all seemed to look back upon. How weary a heart-ache its memory could still bring! She sighed heavily as she at last rose and rang for her maid.

How much life loses when it imposes the obligations of rank upon one! How infinitely she would have preferred to go out in her simple cotton gown and straw hat, gloveless, sunshadeless, as of old. Instead, she put on a costly dress of French muslin, belted round the waist with broad white ribbon, and a wide-brimmed hat, artfully combining black lace and deep yellow roses. They were the choice of her French maid Hortense, whose views of suitable toilette for the country were largely drawn from *Le Follet* and *La Mode Parisien*.

Lady Ellingsworth drove through the village, exciting much admiration and receiving many a greeting. She drew up at last at the old-fashioned tumbledown house belonging to Dr. Carrick. He was at home, and she went into the low-ceilinged quaint old drawing-room, beloved of her childish days. It was cool and shady—the long windows opened on a verandah, heavily creepered and fragrant with climbing roses.

In a moment the old doctor bustled in.

“My dear child, I'm delighted, I'm overjoyed! Your father told me he expected you, but I'd no idea you'd be here so soon. And how are ye? Bless my soul, but you've grown into a fine woman in these years. Not much of my little wild girl left, eh?”

He wrung her hands and wiped his eyes. “Well, well, my darling, life has many changes and surprises for us. I'm a lonely old man now. You know; yes, of course, you heard of my poor wife. No more suffering for her, God be thanked. No more tests of that beautiful patience.”

He followed her eyes to the wide old couch by the open window—on it lay a folded shawl of white China *crêpe*.

“I leave them just as they were,” he said, “just as they were! Not that I'd be forgetting. . . . Every hour of my life I think of her. Her memory fills the place as the scent of those flowers fills the room. But there, we'll not be thinking of sorrowful things! What about yourself? You're well—happy? Ah, of course, of course. I've never forgiven you

for running off to England and taking an English husband. 'Twas an injustice to your native land—and after breaking all the hearts in Dublin, too. Have you seen Mrs. Kilmayne yet?"

"No. To tell the truth, I came to ask you to dine with us to-night, for the Kilmaynes are coming."

"With all the pleasure in life, my dear Hermia. I'm only too delighted!"

She half smiled. "Ah, doctor," she said, "it's good to hear the old genuine speech again—the hearty welcome, the frank reception. I'm sick already of artificial life and conventionalities."

"No, are ye now?" he exclaimed. "Well, I wouldn't credit it. You look the grand lady they call you to the life. When I think of you—eh, Hermia?—torn frock, bare arms, and any sort of head-wearing that came handy, from a fishing cap to a sunbonnet! Ah, dear me, dear me! A queer thing is life—a queer thing, indeed. But you'll have some tea, now, eh, my dear? You'll see old Moll Doherty again. Yes. She's with me still, hale and hearty as ever, bless her."

He rang the bell. It was answered by an elderly woman neatly dressed, and with grey hair brushed smoothly on either side her face.

"Doherty," said the doctor. "Here's our old friend come to see us. Perhaps you remember her!"

"Remember is it? Ah, now, glory be to God, if it's not our swate Miss Hermy! Remember! Faith, ma'am, and it's not Moll Doherty wad be forgittin' you, though 'tis a long time ye've been out o' the country, what with schoolin' and the grand marriage. Faith, ma'am, my lady I mane, we read all that in the newspapers, and proud and happy I was to hear ov it!"

Lady Ellingsworth had taken the extended hand, and was standing looking down at the kindly face. Here, she felt, were warm hearts, loving memories—over, under, around her. Her proud face lost some of its pride and hardness. Her eyes grew soft.

"Ah, Doherty," she said, "I thought you'd have forgotten me long ago. What was I ever but a plague and a hindrance to you?"

"Plague is it, ma'am? Divil a bit more ov a plague than any other childers is. Shure 'tis nature, and God made them so. And 'tis the grand lady ye are now, ma'am. Shure,

doesn't the whole village talk ov ye? and I've had the Red Hen sitting at the kitchen door the whole ov this blessed mornin' and I up to my eyes wid the bakin'. Sorra a bit she'd go till she'd gone through the whowle history ov ye, and the way the property come to yer mother. The saints rest her sowl!"

"There, there, Doherty, that will do!" exclaimed her master. "You're every bit as bad as the Red Hen yourself. You'd stand gossiping here all day if I'd let you. Be off with you, and send us in some tea and some of them same cakes you've been baking. You'll maybe refresh your memory of them, Hermy, my dear—I'm not going to call you Lady Ellingsworth, so don't be expecting it."

She reseated herself, laughing softly.

"Indeed no, Dr. Carrick. I wouldn't have you alter one bit, nor dear old Doherty either. If you only knew how sweet it is to hear the old voices, the old words——"

"And the old brogue, Hermy."

"Yes, doctor, and the old brogue. My heart warms to it. My father can never understand why all my tastes and proclivities are so intensely Irish."

"It's in your blood, me dear, as it was in your mother's. Sure, they tried their best to turn her into an Englishwoman, but 'twas no use. She came back to us just the same, bless her heart, just the same. Ah, and she was good to the family too, such of them as were left. Faith, Hermy, my darling, 'twas the devil's own luck they had, those same Creaghs of Knockrea. Ah, 'twas a terrible history, terrible—what with debts and troubles and bad marriages and one thing with another."

"They say there are none left now," she said as he paused.

"That's true. Well, so much the better for you, my darling, and a proud day it will be for us when you come into your own. Not that we'd be wishing any harm to your father, and, indeed, it's just miracles that he's worked with the property, and how he's added to it and improved it. Still, the blood's not in it, and his work's done more for fear than love. By the way, is your husband with you?"

"No, he couldn't get away from town so soon. He'll join me next week."

"I suppose he's very proud of you. He ought to be, and he makes you happy, eh, my dear?"

"Oh, yes," she said carelessly, "I have everything mortal

woman could possibly desire. But I hate England. I always shall. I wish we could live here."

"Is aught impossible to wealth like yours?" he asked, smiling.

"Oh, I don't know about wealth. The estates seem pretty much encumbered, and those stables of Ellingsworth's cost a fortune. He breeds racers, you know, that are always to win some great event and always just fail by a neck, or a half-neck. I only know it means frightful sums expended on stables and jockeys, that bring no return."

Dr. Carrick looked grave.

"But this is a serious matter, my dear. Excuse plain speaking, but the racecourse can bring even the largest fortune to beggary. Have you no influence?"

"Influence!" she laughed. "Oh, dear me, how behind the times you are. Nowadays, if a wife tries to influence her husband it generally ends in the Divorce Court! Oh, don't look shocked, my dear doctor. Society gives us a liberal education, I assure you. In this sleepy hollow what can you know of men and women who live but for the world's applause? puppets on the stage of life, a magnificent pageantry, all show and brilliance, as hollow as it is dazzling, as vicious as it is weak!"

"Why, Hermia!" he said.

"You look quite shocked. I forgot how strange it must seem to you that I should talk like this, but I couldn't help it, doctor! In a natural atmosphere I grow natural, just as in an artificial one I have learnt the laws of restraint and self-discipline. But I never took kindly to discipline, did I, doctor? Ah, here comes the tea."

CHAPTER V.

"You will pour it out, my dear?" said Dr. Carrick, as Doherty left the room after depositing the old-fashioned silver tray and its dainty appurtenances on a small table by the open window.

Hermia drew off her gloves, and unpinned the fragile net veil which bound her hat. Then she took the low chair he offered, and commenced her duties, while he watched her with a wondering admiration that seemed trying to connect the past with the present. She had changed so greatly. It was almost impossible to associate this proud, stately grace with the lovely, half-wild gipsy who had been wont to run wild about the woods and fields of Knockrea. She was so beautiful, and her dress, even to his ignorant man's eyes, looked so rich and fair a setting for her beauty.

To a student of character there was often something repellent as well as attractive in the expression of the eye and mouth, but at the present moment the pride and coldness were blotted out by a certain wistful softness that lent her a rarer charm than the world knew of.

As a rule her face was a mask to her inner self. There was something unapproachable about her; but in this quiet, shady room, with its wealth of old memories and old associations, there was no need of the mask. She could afford to be natural.

She leant back in her low chair, and sipped her tea, and tasted Moll Doherty's famous cakes, and gave herself up to the simple enjoyment of a long-denied pleasure.

The old doctor chatted on of a hundred and one village incidents, country-side casualties, changes of birth, death, and marriage, and she listened with eager interest, making few comments, but losing nothing of the import of anecdote or event. He remembered after she left that she said but little about herself, that she had displayed none of the eagerness to confide her matrimonial triumphs and the splendors of her positions that a young and happy wife might have displayed excusably, and that of her husband she said little or nothing.

On the whole, he was greatly puzzled and greatly disturbed.

She had been so great a favorite of his always, from the hour of her birth, now twenty-two years ago, to the time when he had lost sight of her, and only knew she had been sent to a fashionable and exclusive school to be finished. She had married so quickly after that "finishing process" that he had been unable to resume anything like the old fatherly intimacy, and now she had come back changed almost out of knowledge.

Long after she had left—long after the carriage wheels had rolled away into silence, he sat there thinking and pondering over this change.

He sat on so long that Moll Doherty came in unsummoned to remove the tea-things, and was surprised to find him in the same chair, and with the tea he had poured out for himself untasted. Her entry roused him. He knew a gossip was inevitable.

"I'm not going to dine here to-night, Doherty," he said. "Lady Ellingsworth came to ask me over to Knockree for dinner."

"It's a hard name to get your tongue round," answered the old woman, "and sure Miss Hermy seems more natural whin we're talkin' ov her. Ah, but 'tis a fine woman she's grown, and wid the beautiful face ov her mother, though there's a look in it that I'm not altogether liking. It's just a curl o' the lips, for all the world like ould Mr. Marsden himself whin he's the bad mood on him. Do you think she's happy, sor?"

"Happy? Why, of course she is. She's everything to make her so."

"True for ye, she has, sor. But it isn't having everything to make you happy that does it. I know that well meself, and so does a power ov other poor women-folk. It's little we want, sor, but it's the thing that we want and *get* that makes us happy; and nothing else can make up for it, supposin' we can get it. Now, I'm thinkin' that's the way wid Miss Hermia. She's got a great deal, but she's not got the one thing she craves for."

"Oh, nonsense, woman!" cried the doctor. "I daresay it's all our fancy ——"

"Ah, so you had the fancy, too, sor! It's no use denying it. I saw it in your face, and it may be nonsinse, but half o' life's made up o' nonsinse where women is consarned, and we've all our feelings, rich and poor alike, sor."

"And your tongues too, eh, Doherty?" laughed the doctor. "There, be off with you now, and put my dress clothes out

for me, and tell Phelim to have the covered car round by seven o'clock. They dine at half-past, but it takes full twenty minutes to get there now Mr. Marsden has made that new drive."

"Shure, I'm thinking not a Creagh, dead or alive, 'ud be knowin' the look ov his own land could he see it now!" exclaimed the old housekeeper. "It's a cruel thing the way the ould properties are going, and the ould names disappearin'. 'Castles falling and dunghills rising,' says the Red Hen to me the last time as iver we were talking ov the Knockrea property, and, faith, that's just what it is, sor, and little love lost between Mr. Marsden and his tenants, though they're mortal feared ov him for some rasin or other."

Then she got herself and her tea-tray and her indignation out of the door, and Dr. Carrick went to his own study for a smoke and a quiet perusal of some recent medical treatise on hay fever in which he was much interested. Meanwhile, the carriage drove through shady lanes and under spreading trees to the ascent of a hill, where stood the remains of a ruined abbey.

Many a time in her childish days had she roamed here to picnic among the grey arches and wander through the old cloisters, now a heap of broken masonry. From the ruined belfry tower one could see the whole lovely landscape for miles round—its vivid green pasturage and rich woodland—the little village nestling at the foot of the hill entwined by trees and fully dependent on the enchantment of "distance" for the hopes it raised in the breast of any wandering tourist—the silvery gleam of the river in the distance—and around all, the sheltering hills now clothed in all the luxuriance of summer foliage.

Lady Ellingsworth left the carriage at the foot of the ascent and walked up to the ruins. She reached a series of broken archways that represented all that had once been the cloisters. The sound of a voice checked her steps, and made her look with some curiosity through an ivy-screened aperture of ruined masonry.

She saw a dog, wiry, half-starved, with one eye closed and the other very alert, sitting up on a mound of grass, its back against a pile of mossy stones. By its side was a child, her hand uplifted in an attitude of command, the warm sunlight falling on her uncovered head and turning its tangled locks to ruddy gold.

"Now listen, Tim," she was saying, and her voice with its pretty inflections seemed singularly refined in contrast to her appearance. "It's a beautiful story I'm telling ye, and ye're not attendin' to me. Well, he gave up the beautiful lady, though his heart was nigh to break with the sorrow of it, and he came here and joined the holy monks, and when they walked about in the beautiful grounds his eyes could see the valley where they used to meet, and the roof that covered her, and that was all he had to make him happy for many and many a long year. And she could look from her windy up here to where the belfry stood and listen to the bells as they rang for the Mass, and maybe she'd think of him and maybe she'd feel sorry, but she wint away one day and she got married, Tim, and thin she was dreadfully unhappy—and niver a child to call her own—and one evening she came out and wandered up the hill, and there, beyant the woods, suddenly she met him coming down, for he was going to see a sick person in the village—he was a mighty kind man and loved more than any ov the other monks—and they looked at each other, Tim, just one look, and they knew, each in their own hearts, that they hadn't forgotten, and——"

But Tim had slipped away, and discovering an intruder was manifesting indignation thereat in sharp, shrill barks, which brought his young mistress after him very quickly. When she saw the lady she stopped short. Her eyes, glowing like stars beneath the thick tangles of gold-brown hair, fixed themselves on the proud and lovely face which had so allured her childish fancy.

"Perhaps," said Lady Ellingsworth, "you will call your dog away?"

"Oh shure, he won't hurt you," she said. "Come here, Tim, ye vagabond. Can't you see 'tis a lady?"

The ragged Irish terrier ceased barking and crept to her side. The lady in question stood calmly looking at them both, and wondering why the picturesque only showed itself in lower grades of life.

The child, in her ragged, thin skirt—through the rents of which showed a bit of deep orange-colored petticoat—with her lovely mass of hair, and glowing eyes, was indeed a picture. It struck Lady Ellingsworth that somewhere, in some past time, she had gazed on a similar picture, but memory offered it no fitting frame at that moment.

She seated herself on a pile of stones.

"Ah, do not run away. Tell me, what is your name?" she said quietly, as the wild, pretty creature began backing from her presence, the dog by her side, but a new sense of shyness impelling a retreat.

The child paused. "They call me Kitty the Rag," she said.

"Do you live in the village?" continued her questioner.

"Yes, ma'am. I lives with the Dalin' Woman, only she's mostly away, and gran'father, he's not much to tell of. He's always for speechifyin' and talkin' of what ought to be done by the quality, and I've to dig the purtaty beds and feed the cocks and hens."

"Oh!" she said, smiling at the graphic picture. "And where are your own parents?"

"I don't know, ma'am. Biddy says my mother's dead. As for my father, I niver heerd tell ov him."

"And this man, who lets you work while he talks of his wrongs, is he really your grandfather?"

"He's Biddy's husband. Shure, every one knows Jim Maguire."

"Maguire!" she started ever so slightly. "Is his name Maguire? There are so many of that name in this county."

"Thru for ye, ma'am. Biddy says they were a great family onst. They're poor enough now."

"Are your grandparents very poor?"

"Oh, we've none so much to complain ov, ma'am. There's always food, and we've got a dacent cabin, and Biddy makes a fair penny, so I've heerd her say, and she's that good to me——"

"And you're happy and content, Kitty?"

"Happy!" a strange flash shot from the dark eyes. "No, ma'am, I'm not. I want——"

She paused abruptly; she remembered how freely she was talking to this grand lady, and a warning of Biddy's occurred to her.

"Well?" said the questioner. "What is it you want?"

"I'll never get it," laughed the child scornfully. "Biddy says I might as well cry for the moon."

"Let me hear this impossible desire," said Lady Ellingsworth with strange gentleness. "I am rich. I may be able to help you."

The child's eyes fell—her mouth took a sullen droop.

"No," she said. "You couldn't help me. You couldn't make me a lady, like yourself."

“Is that what you want?” The clear voice took an added note of scornful surprise. “To be a lady! Well, Kitty, I fancy Biddy’s right. That is a thing only comes by inheritance. You can’t buy it, you can’t learn it. But what makes you discontented with your own position? As a rule I have found your class singularly humble in their demands. A roof to shelter them, a little food, a few pigs, and a little work as an excuse for so many advantages. What makes you think you’d like to be a lady, Kitty?”

She had drawn off one of her gloves. The white hand and delicately ringed fingers lay idly on her lap. The child’s eyes rested on them. Then she looked at her own clasped round the dog’s body. Brown they were, and stained, and coarsened by work and neglect, but their shape was slender, and they were small, like the arched feet that Biddy had cased in patched shoes a mile too large for them.

“I don’t know why I think it,” she said. “It came to me when I saw you.”

“Me? When have you seen me before to-day?”

“I saw ye drivin’ in the carriage the day you came to the great house.”

“Oh!” The smile was cold and slighting. Her interest in the pretty, wild-looking elf had abated considerably since she heard of her ambition. The desire of imitation may be a form of flattery, but it is not a form that always appeals to the person imitated.

“And ever since then you have thought you would like to be a lady also?” she went on.

“I mean to be one,” said the child, in a strange, fierce voice. “I’ll never rest till I do. I’ve told Biddy so. She’s goin’ to help me.”

Lady Ellingsworth’s eyes grew interested again.

“Indeed, and how is it to be accomplished?” she asked.

“I dunno yet,” said the child sullenly. “But Biddy’s mighty clever, and when she sets herself to do a thing she always does it.”

Lady Ellingsworth rose and shook out her muslin skirts. “My dear child,” she said, “I fancy it would take a cleverer person even than Biddy to work out such a transformation. The heritage of race, the heritage of birth, alone create the superiority of class. You will understand it some day. Meanwhile——” She drew out a dainty trifle of ivory and silver representing a purse, and opened it,

The child drew back. "No, ma'am, thank you," she said. "Biddy will never let me take money from any one."

"Indeed," said Lady Ellingsworth, somewhat mystified by so unexpected a rebuff. "Then you and Biddy are singularly unlike the generality of your race."

"We're not beggars," said the child proudly, flashing defiance from her brilliant eyes. "We ask nothing from people that we don't earn ourselves."

Lady Ellingsworth closed the purse. "I thought," she said, "you might like to buy some trifle for yourself, in remembrance of this talk of ours."

"I'll be rememberin' it; never you fear, ma'am. And thank you kindly for wantin' to give me somethin', but I've promised Biddy, and I niver broke my word to her yet."

"You are a strange child," said Lady Ellingsworth. "But you are right to do what Biddy tells you."

She still held the purse in her hand. The child's eyes rested on it with a longing she could not control.

"'Never be beholden to any one,' says Biddy. But a gift is different to a keepsake," she said slowly.

"Then you would take a keepsake?" asked Lady Ellingsworth, smiling at the distinction. "Well, what shall it be?"

"Perhaps it's too bold of me to ax for the likes o' that," she pointed to the purse; "but if ye'd take the money out and give it me, I'll kape it always just for memory ov you, ma'am—all my life—I promise ye."

Lady Ellingsworth looked at the costly trifle. She did not value it, she had plenty of others, but a strange feeling of reluctance made her hesitate. Then slowly she opened it and poured its gold and silver contents into the palm of her hand.

"They say that to court the impossible is almost to obtain it," she murmured with a faint smile. "You are an extraordinary child, even for an Irish one. I wonder whether you will ever get within speaking distance of your ambition?"

The child watched her steadily, understanding nothing of what she was saying, intent only on the pretty trifle that seemed about to pass into her possession.

Lady Ellingsworth thrust the loose coins into the pocket of her gown, and held out the purse.

"There, Kitty," she said. "Some day, perhaps, we shall meet again, and I will ask you if you remember your promise."

The child stepped forward and took it. She did not curtsy. There was a certain stubborn pride in her that forbade the bend of knee even to this beautiful and superior woman.

“Thank you, ma’am,” she said, and her eyes had a wonderful softened glow under their heavy lashes. “I mane what I’ve said. I’ll kape it all my life.”

CHAPTER VI.

DINNER was over. In the damask-hung drawing-room of Knockrea Lady Ellingsworth and Mrs. Kilmayne were sitting over their coffee, while in the dining-room beyond the men sipped claret of the first quality, and told stories of—the worst.

Lady Ellingsworth left all the talking to the vicar's wife. She had a tongue like a running brook, and a store of information whose accuracy was little less marvelous than its extent. She was a fine, tall, fresh-colored woman, who had reared a large family and placed them out in the world in various positions of independence and use. Having so far fulfilled her own duty in life, she spent most of her time in interfering with that of other people. Her tongue made her an object of dread to a cautious or more reticent sisterhood, and the admirable method in which she had brought up her own family served a no less admirable purpose in the enforcing of precept and example to a limited parish. Perhaps the personal illustration that she invariably offered became a little irksome at times. There are few things more trying than to be asked to admire virtue by a living embodiment of it.

Still Mrs. Kilmayne was a general favorite, and a perfect encyclopædia of information as to parish pedigrees and misdoings.

“Changes!” she was saying. “Ah, me dear Lady Ellingsworth, changes indeed. The parish isn't like the same—so many of the good families broken up, and the properties changing hands. There's Lord Dunsane, now; he never comes near his place, and the people hate his agent like poison. Never a thing will he do for one of the tenantry, and last winter was very trying. My husband and I were worked off our legs almost, trying to get food and medicine for the sick. There was an outbreak of fever, you know. Perhaps your father mentioned it. He was very kind. He helped us a great deal—not personally, of course, but by money, and food, and things. Ah! Lady Ellingsworth, Ireland is a terrible country to live in; there's no doubt about it. The people are so thriftless and so thankless. They seem to think it's their bounden right to be provided for by their more

provident or more fortunate neighbors. Now, look at that creature they call the Red Hen. She has never done a stroke of work in her life. She has a brood of illegitimate children, who grew up—well, as weeds do I suppose—and she lives by begging from door to door all over the country. And no one thinks any the worse of her, and if you turn her away she simply sits down and curses you in the most awful manner. Now, I ask you, would such a state of things be tolerated anywhere save in such a country as this?"

Lady Ellingsworth smiled languidly. "Oh," she said, "there are beggars all the world over. England is full of them. Spain and Italy swarm with them. They are not only the growth of Irish soil, believe me. I suppose their existence is a misfortune; but civilization hasn't solved the riddle of its necessity."

"The priests encourage them," continued Mrs. Kilmayne. "Their ignorance is disgraceful, and their superstition perfectly horrible. They believe in the efficacy of charms; in the water from what they call the 'holy well'; in witchcraft and miracles."

"Well, we did the same once," said Lady Ellingsworth. "They are only half a century or so behind us. After all, what does it matter what they believe? They accept what they're taught, poor souls. The fault lies with the teachers."

"Would you say that to Father Dillon?"

"Yes, or to any one. I have no particular respect for the priesthood of any denomination. Judging by results, the world is little better under Protestantism than it was under Catholicism, but the former is a more comfortable creed for the individual, I grant."

"Ah, Lady Ellingsworth, you've been imbibing all sorts of advanced notions, I fear. The Bible is, of course, our only guide, and I find it an invincible foe to popery and superstition."

"There is a good deal of superstition, not only in the Bible, but in the way it is regarded," remarked Lady Ellingsworth. "I cannot, of course, say I have studied it as carefully as you or your husband, for instance, but I studied it at one period of my life, and it didn't comfort me."

"Ah, me! dear Lady Ellingsworth, you didn't go the right way to get comfort. You were too critical, too doubting maybe. It is the simple faith that gains comfort, believe me; the child-spirit asking and accepting what it wants."

"As we have drifted on to this subject," said Lady Ellingsworth, "may I ask if you think that all human beings are alike?"

"Alike—no! We all differ from one another."

"Then, Mrs. Kilmayne, how can you expect every one of us to accept any problem of life, especially its greatest and most puzzling one, in the same manner? You talk of simple faith. The child has it because it knows no better. Its mind is as dependent on others as its body. But we can't always remain children, and then we can't accept without question, or judge without evidence."

"Ah, me! dear Lady Ellingsworth, you forget I am a clergyman's wife. I mustn't listen to heresies. Perhaps you are one of those whose minds have been set adrift by pagan philosophies, or over much culture. I always said you were kept at school too long. There's a Mrs. Montessor come to live here, at Ballina. She is a widow, and of good family, on her side, though the husband wasn't much to speak of, with one son. He's in the army, and at Cork now, with his regiment. Well, she talks just like you, and every one says she's such a clever woman. Whenever she's in church, Mr. Kilmayne gets quite nervous over his sermon. And her arguments—oh, my dear, it's quite terrible sometimes. She says she's been thirty years trying to find a rational religion, and she can't. Ah, my dear Lady Ellingsworth, it's a true saying that 'many are called, but few chosen.'"

"Judging from my experience of self-satisfied Christians and self-satisfying creeds I should be inclined to say, 'Few are called, but many think they are chosen,' " said Lady Ellingsworth. "But do not let us continue this controversy. You were telling me about the state of the village. When I drove through it to-day I thought it looked very much improved—cleaner, and brighter, and more prosperous altogether."

"Oh, your father has done wonders here!" exclaimed Mrs. Kilmayne. "We often say it's a pity he's no son—ah! me dear, a thousand pardons, but a slip of the tongue you know. Never mind, it's a fine property it will be for your sons, and that will be almost the same thing. Of course, it's early days yet to speak of such matters."

A scarlet flush dyed the beautiful face lying back against the brocaded cushions of the chair. Then it faded out, leaving it strangely white. Mrs. Kilmayne noticed it, and with the

instinct of a matron who had done her duty almost too well in such matters, she launched forth into incidents respecting her early married days, and the various ailments and accidents that beset the nursery. These interesting records kept her going until the entrance of the gentlemen afforded her listener some relief.

Mr. Kilmayne, who was an enthusiastic whist player, asked for his favorite game. He was a massive and imposing-looking man, with a deep voice and a manner that inspired confidence. Looking at him one thought instinctively of the dignity of office, and felt that the robes of a bishop would be eminently becoming. He did not talk much, at least when his wife was present, and he was excessively polite to Lady Ellingsworth, having heard that there was the gift of a comfortable living in Lord Ellingsworth's power.

His disappointment at her refusal to play whist was so evident that she tried to atone for it by promising to sing for them, if the music would not interfere with the game.

The offer seemed to surprise her father. He made no remark, but he listened with the severity of a critic as she began an Irish ballad. Her voice was a contralto, rich and passionate and melodious. She seemed to throw off her habitual coldness and restraint once she let loose its thrilling tones, and the players paused after the first round, and, as if by mutual consent, postponed the next deal till the lovely air was concluded.

Then she rose abruptly. "Music and cards don't go well together," she said. "I told you my singing would disturb you. Go on with your game. I am going out on the terrace."

Dr. Carrick's keen eyes alone caught the glitter of a tear on the curling lashes as she closed the instrument and went out into the soft starshine, filled with the scents of the roses.

"She is not happy," he said to himself as he followed suit to Mrs. Kilmayne's lead. "There is something strange about her. I wonder what she lacks. . . . I shall be glad when Lord Ellingsworth comes. Perhaps that will give me the clue."

"How your daughter has improved, if I may say so," interposed Mrs. Kilmayne as Philip Marsden marked the trick and shuffled the pack for his opponents. "So beautiful—such dignity—such gracious manners! I can't think of her as the girl we used to know at all! Isn't it wonder-

ful what English society and education can do for us? I remember my own daughter Margaretta—the one with the fair hair, you'll remember, Mr. Marsden. Well, she went over to England to stay with a cousin of mine who had married and settled there, when she was sixteen—Margaretta I mean—and she was away six months, and when she came back, why her manners were the talk of the place. Indeed, Lady Ellingsworth puts me much in mind of her."

"My dear Clara," interposed her husband impatiently, "even a mother's partiality can hardly excuse such a comparison. Pray attend to the game and let us have no family reminiscences. They cannot possibly interest Mr. Marsden!"

To and fro on the terrace without that white figure passed in its stately grace. The four pair of eyes watched with strangely different feelings, but with one strangely persistent sentiment of curiosity.

It was odd, too, that the same thought, though roused by opposing influences, dominated each mind: "When Lord Ellingsworth comes here."

They had all known her under widely different circumstances. They could not recognize her as in any way belonging to them now. The transformation was too wonderful to escape comment or discussion. Dr. Carrick kept his reflections to himself.

Mrs. Kilmayne, however, was not so reticent. Indeed that good lady's tongue was rarely unemployed in her neighbors' concerns.

Lady Ellingsworth's arrival was a godsend to it. The vicarage was within walking distance of Knockrea, and her black silk allowed of being pinned up under a Galway cloak that had seen much service, and as she had never altered her style of hairdressing for the last fifteen years, it did not suffer by the contrast of a bonnet more serviceable than fashionable. Lady Ellingsworth thought of the *decolletée* and chignoned London dowagers, and of their appearance as they left or entered an evening entertainment. She half smiled as she bade Mrs. Kilmayne good-night in the hall. Perhaps some primitive virtues struck her as more amusing than admirable.

"Well, I must say," exclaimed that voluble lady, as they walked down the moonlit path to the south lodge, "I must say, Edward, I never could have believed she was the same

creature. It doesn't seem possible! Not that the change is altogether for the better. Her religious views are really most extraordinary; more so even than Mrs. Montessor's. She quite holds with beggars and the thriftless senseless beings of the lower orders. I hope you'll preach a good sermon on Sunday morning, Edward. She said she would come to church, and she asked if you had a choir yet or whether old Peggy Boyle still did double duty. Fancy remembering how she used to walk up the aisle with the coalbox in her hand to mend the stove, and leading the singing all the time! I told her we'd amended all those dreadful ways—not but what Peggy had a beautiful voice and we missed her very much—but the boys are so troublesome, and the organist doesn't care a bit about the services. He is always saying we have too many. Of course you never hear these things, Edward, but I do."

"My dear," said the vicar quietly, "you take very good care that I shall hear them also."

"It is a benighted place," lamented his wife. "I wish you could get away from it. I wonder whether Lord Ellingsworth could do anything for you. The bishops always seem to forget that there are any English clergy in Ireland."

"I am very anxious to see Lord Ellingsworth," said Mr. Kilmayne. "I have no idea what sort of man he is, and Marsden is singularly reticent on the subject. Did it strike you, Clara—women are so much keener-sighted in these matters—did it strike you at all that Lady Ellingsworth did not seem exactly happy? And surely it is a little—ah, strange—how do these things strike women?—that she paid her first visit here since her marriage, unaccompanied by her husband."

"Oh, but then he is to follow very shortly."

"So shortly," continued the vicar dryly, "that I wonder she did not wait for him, or he could not have put off his own engagements for her."

"Ah, my dear Edward," said Mrs. Kilmayne, "you mustn't expect people in their position to have domestic virtues. They leave them for humbler folks."

"Like—ourselves, my dear Clara."

"Well," she said, giving the arm she held a wifely pressure, "we've been very happy together, Edward. And there's many married folks couldn't say that. I often think

if you were made a dean or a bishop we mightn't get on so well. I'm better fitted for a country parish than a diocese, and it must be very fatiguing to live up to such dignity. Besides, so much more is expected of the wife of a bishop. You know we have St. Paul's authority for that. I think he says something about their bonnets."

"Well, yours are always very suitable, my dear Clara," said the wise husband.

"Suitable maybe, Edward, but they're rather behind the fashion."

"Ah," he said placidly, "I understand. Even the life of a vicar, forgotten by the holders of Church honors, has—compensations."

CHAPTER VII.

THE fact that Lord Ellingsworth had arrived on the Saturday night received open advertisement by his appearance in church on Sunday, in company with his wife and father-in-law.

His appearance did not excite so much admiration as curiosity. He was a young man, heavy of build, florid of complexion, a head shorter than his wife, and with nothing in the way of features or stature to justify his title, or cast that magic halo of "aristocratic lineage" around his brow which every one had expected.

His wife looked as if any number of belted earls might have contributed to her descent, but Ellingsworth himself might very well have passed for a jockey out of training, or a decadent member of the prize ring.

He had evidently gone to church from a sense of duty, for he yawned all through the service, and manifested his interest in the abstruse doctrines placidly put forth by the preacher by closed eyes and a gradually increased placidity of breathing.

His wife paid no heed to him. She sat as far from his side as the limited space of the pew permitted, and her face wore an expression of proud composure and utter indifference that struck one at least of the congregation as almost insolent.

This person was Mrs. Montessor, the recent tenant of Ballina, whom Mrs. Kilmayne had spoken of. With all the best intentions to curb her curiosity this lady found it impossible to keep her eyes from that perfect face, or to restrain her appreciation of the faultless simplicity of a Parisian gown, and the *chic* charm of a Parisian bonnet.

They interfered severely with her attentions to the rubric, or her usual critical interest in the sermon.

When the service was over Mrs. Kilmayne hurried out.

Lady Ellingsworth and her husband were a few steps in advance. They stopped for the carriage to come round, and the vicar's wife bustled up, all eagerness and vivacity as usual.

Lady Ellingsworth introduced her husband, and at the same moment Mrs. Montessor passed them.

The eyes of the two women met. A wave of interest seemed to sweep away the previous indifference of Lady Ellingsworth's face. She said something quickly to the voluble speaker, and in another moment that good lady had introduced Judith Montessor as their new neighbor at Ballina. Hermia found herself shaking hands with a woman of medium stature, elegant mould, and a deeply interesting face. It showed signs of thought, of a reserve power of deep feeling, and of no small intellectual capacity.

All first greetings of first acquaintanceship are bound to be conventional. Judith Montessor, however, escaped that obstacle with a certain graceful ease that no one would have called presumption.

"I was looking at you in church, Lady Ellingsworth," she said, "and wondering whether etiquette imposed the tax of a first card on me as a resident or on you as a dignitary. Your father and I are already acquainted."

"Come and see me to-morrow," said Lady Ellingsworth, warming at once to the frank smile and easy manner. "I shall be at home all the afternoon. My stay here is too short for conventionalities, though I think you deserve to be called the resident."

"I suppose so. But I shall certainly call. I am sorry to hear your stay is limited. One learns to appreciate new elements as well as new faces in country life. In town, variety is, of course, at any one's choice."

"I am afraid," said Lady Ellingsworth, "that I don't appreciate variety as you seem to do. The old friends and the old scenes appeal to me as nothing else has ever done."

Mrs. Montessor looked at her with sudden, quick comprehension. In her heart she was thinking: "How much that face masks."

Then the carriage came up, and the Knockrea party drove off, leaving endless gossip, malice, and envy at work, with Sunday gowns that had suddenly become hopelessly old-fashioned.

Women can forgive most things, but to be out-rivalled in dress by a woman on whom they have been accustomed to look down is a hard matter, and borders on the inexcusable. No one had thought much of Hermia Marsden, but every one felt compelled to acknowledge the dignity of Lady Ellings-

worth. Mrs. Montessor still lingered beside the vicar's wife. Her eyes were following the fast-disappearing carriage.

"Well, what do you think of her?" asked that good lady briskly. "Didn't I say she had the style about her? What was her dress? I couldn't make out the material, but I saw 'twas real Honiton on her bonnet. And she—a chit of a thing, whose ears I used to box same as I would my Cissie's, and with brown Holland frocks all torn. Well, well, it's a queer topsy-turvy world, eh, Mrs. Montessor? To think I had her in my arms when she was four days old, and look at her now."

"She certainly must look rather different," said Mrs. Montessor, smiling as she opened her sunshade. "No one could help admiring her. She is a very beautiful woman. I wonder if she is happy?"

It was the same doubt already raised on Hermia's behalf by the friends who had known her in her youth. It seemed strange that it should also be the expression of the first stranger to whom she had been introduced in her old home.

"Happy? Well, I wouldn't breathe it to a soul, Mrs. Montessor, my dear, but between you and me, I don't think she is. We had a long talk together the other evening, for Edward and I were asked up to dinner the very day after she arrived, and I used my powers of discretion, my dear, and she didn't talk like a young wife and a happy wife ought to talk; and not the least interest did she seem to take in what I told her about my poor Margaretta's measles, or how I had to nurse all the boys with the scarlet fever at one time."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Montessor genially, "that was certainly a very bad sign, Mrs. Kilmayne; but I don't know that it argues absence of happiness in her own lot."

Mrs. Kilmayne shook her head. "She must have a great deal of money," she said. "I wonder if she'd give us new cushions for the chancel if we asked her; and as for the organ, it's a disgrace. Did you hear the way it went off this morning?"

"I did, indeed. It seemed bent on taking a trip to 'Greenland's icy mountains' on its own account. But there, Mrs. Kilmayne, I must run away. We're setting a bad example, gossiping like this."

She nodded and walked off, and Mrs. Kilmayne turned down the shady churchyard toward the rectory, an old rambling place within convenient distance of the church, and com-

bining all the effects of the picturesque with the disadvantages of a roof and drains that had been planned on no principles of safety or rules of sanitation. She had reared her family, however, in spite of such drawbacks.

Over the cold dinner which was the Sunday rule in summer time, Mrs. Kilmayne again dilated on the subject of Hermia Ellingsworth, *née* Hermia Marsden deposed.

It seemed a subject of inexhaustible interest, and therefore to become table talk for a long time to come.

"I wonder how Mrs. Montessor will get on with her," she remarked.

"Or she with Mrs. Montessor," said Mr. Kilmayne. "I always feel grateful that she took Ballina. She is one of the few women who can make the best of moderate means without perpetually telling you they have seen better days."

"She wears very stylish bonnets," observed Mrs. Kilmayne thoughtfully.

"Well, she is young enough to do that. Besides she is amply justified in doing it, for she makes them herself."

"Who told you so? I cannot believe it."

"I saw her once at the work. It seemed so easy, and she did it so quickly, that I've often wondered why you deem it necessary to make a journey to Cork when you require a new one."

"As if I only went for the sake of the bonnets, Edward. There's heaps of things besides: things for the house and the parish, and for yourself, too. Fancy making her own bonnets, and never to tell me, often as I've admired them."

"Which only shows she is a true woman," said the vicar, sending his plate for raspberry tart again. "She can keep a secret which concerns herself."

"She said nothing about the sermon to-day," observed Mrs. Kilmayne presently. "I think she was too interested in Lady Ellingsworth to pay her usual attention. I introduced them after service. She asked me to do so."

"Who asked you?"

"Lady Ellingsworth, of course. I was surprised. I thought she was too indifferent to people to trouble about knowing them, and for so short a time, too. But somehow she seemed to take a fancy to Mrs. Montessor the moment she set eyes on her."

"She is a very attractive woman," remarked the Rev. Edward.

Mrs. Kilmayne bridled sharply. "Indeed, then, Edward, at your time of life, and the father of a grown-up family too, leaving alone your calling, it's other things you should be thinking of than a woman's looks. And she a widow too, which every one knows is a snare, though why I never could imagine, for she's the same woman as when she was married."

"No, my dear. She has a decided advantage—freedom and experience."

"Well, we all know 'tis said that a virtuous woman is a crown to her husband, but there's nothing about widows."

"No," said the vicar gravely; "nor of the nature of the crown. There are thorns as well as roses, you know, Clara."

CHAPTER VIII.

OUT in the cool, shaded verandah of Knockrea the house party were sitting over tea.

Lord Ellingsworth, who did not particularly like his father-in-law, was looking as bored as he had done in church.

His wife was sipping her tea, and throwing morsels of cake to a beautiful Irish setter, which was sitting beside her.

"How is it that Sunday in the country seems to consist of about forty-eight interminable hours?" she remarked. "We all look bored to death. As for you, Arthur, you've done nothing but yawn all day."

"Remember the journey, my darling," he said, looking at her with that wondering admiration so characteristic of his love for her. "I'm the happiest of men, but I'm confoundedly tired and knocked up to-day."

"I hope you'll be all right to-morrow," said Mr. Marsden. "I want to show you over the property. I can give you a fairly good mount, though of course my stables can't compare with yours."

"How is King Canute?" asked Hermia suddenly. "He so nearly won the Derby, father, that I consider him quite a hero."

Mr. Marsden's fair brows took on a slightly perceptible frown.

"It's a risky business, racing," he said. "I thought you were going to give it up, Ellingsworth?"

"So I am, but I've two or three good colts, and I want to do something with them first."

"Jockeys and trainers are not the most honest persons in the world," observed his father-in-law.

"Oh, I'm sure Arthur gets dreadfully cheated," said Lady Ellingsworth. "I've seen some of his bills; they were positively frightful."

"Oh, the place can stand them, never you fear, darling," said her husband. "And you're all right whatever happens."

She colored. It was such bad taste to speak like that, she felt, but then somehow Ellingsworth's remarks were nearly always in bad taste. At times he grated on her unbearably. He was so stupidly devoted, and so utterly devoid of tact.

Her eyes wandered over to the belt of woods beyond the park. She made no answer to that last speech.

Mr. Marsden began to talk about his improvements to the property, and the troubles of an Irish tenantry.

"I don't suppose they're worse than the English," remarked Lord Ellingsworth. "Mine are for ever worrying me about drains and roofs and outhouses. I never take any notice of them."

"Does Hermia find them interesting? She used to have an absorbing fancy for the lower orders at one time," observed Mr. Marsden.

"Oh, she never goes near them. She says they're so stupid and conventional, and that all the children have been brought up on one plan, and can only curtsy and say the catechism and such things, and eat."

"I maintain the Irish have more individuality," she said coldly.

"Well, I hope you'll introduce me to some Handy Andys, or Mickey Free, or that sort of chap. It would be rather amusing, but I suppose they're not really like what Lever says they are?"

"No," said Mr. Marsden, "they're a very great deal worse, and not half so witty. At present their sense of humor consists in riot and bloodshed."

"You don't get that in this part of the country, do you?" asked Lord Ellingsworth, with a sudden glance of apprehension at his wife.

"Oh, no, not in my part of the district," said Mr. Marsden, with a comprehensive wave of his delicate white hand. "I've had to read them some pretty sharp lessons, though. I suppose I'm not what you'd call popular in consequence. The popular landlord is a man like Lord Dunsane, of the Castle. He works on the *laissez aller* system—let's everything take its own course, and doesn't interfere with old prejudices and old notions. Then he's always wondering why his farms don't look like mine."

"Are they such unmanageable people as we are led to suppose?"

"Only to those who won't take the trouble to understand them," said Lady Ellingsworth sharply.

"Oh, my dear, I was forgetting your prejudices," answered her father. "I know your sympathies are entirely with the fancied wrongs of the country."

"Never mind about fancied wrongs. I should like to get hold of some actual facts," observed Lord Ellingsworth. "It would look well to mention them in the House."

"But you never speak," interrupted his wife sarcastically.

"No, but I may some day. I've not come across a suitable subject yet."

"That seems rather a common complaint with your order, at least judging from the speeches that are reported."

"She's always down on me," he observed admiringly. "She knows I'm an awful fool."

Hermia rose impatiently, and took up a great white sunshade by her chair. "I'm going down to the lake," she said. "I'll leave you to discuss politics by yourselves."

"Oh, but I'd rather have you than the politics!" exclaimed her husband. "They'll do any time. Let me come with you."

She frowned impatiently.

"No," she said. "I prefer to go alone. It's my evening service."

He gazed somewhat ruefully at the graceful figure. "She's awfully good to put up with me. I know she thinks I'm a fool," he said frankly. "And she's so clever. People go wild about her in London. At the last Drawing-room there wasn't a woman could hold a candle to her, except the Princess herself."

"And what possessed her to leave town in the height of the season?"

"Oh, I don't know. It's not her way to explain things. She just says she's going to do a thing and does it. We're awfully happy. I never interfere with her at all."

"I don't wonder then that she's happy."

Ellingsworth laughed.

"Well, it's best to give a woman a loose rein. At least I've always found it so. I consider myself a very lucky fellow."

Mr. Marsden looked at him keenly. "You're an easily contented one, I think. But I don't quite agree with you about

the 'loose rein.' Every woman is the better for a master. My experience is wider than yours."

"Ah, yes," said the younger man placidly; "I suppose it is. I didn't know Hermia's mother."

Mr. Marsden bit his lip. After all fools were very trying, he told himself.

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Lady Ellingsworth reached the margin of the lake, and strolled on to the old boat house. How long it seemed since she had been there, how long since her strong young arms had sent the punt from end to end of the dark deep waters. She sank down on the grassy bank and gazed with sad and weary eyes to where the willows kissed the placid depths, above the opening lily cups.

Everything here was so beautiful and so fraught with memory. At times it seemed as if the ache within was almost unbearable. The burden of secret pain is the heaviest of any. What we dare not speak is the canker worm that destroys happiness. To Hermia the present was for ever filled with haunting echoes of a past, unforgotten and unforgettable.

She sat there so still that the birds fluttered to and fro seeking nest and bough in the closing eventide; so long that the saffron tints faded from off the burnished water, leaving them darkly tranquil, so long that the sound of church bells came like a surprise across the valley, and fell on her ear with startling clearness. "It must be late," she said, and rose abruptly.

The movement brought her face to face with a bowed, creeping figure, crossing the soft sward in the track of a passing sunbeam. A strange, weird figure, outlined against the green of the trees and the fading daffodil tints of the closing day.

Her head was bent. It was covered by a faded shawl that had once been red; it was hard to describe its present color. She moved slowly, and did not at first perceive the tall, graceful figure that was watching her approach.

Suddenly she paused, a low cry escaped her lips. "Arrah, now, the saints in hivin be praised. It's Miss Hermy ye are! Ah, me lady, an' it's thirstin' for sight ov ye I've been ivir sin I heerd ye were comin' back to us. Glory be to God, but 'tis the beautiful lady ye've grown, and shure I'd never have known ye, but for thim eyes o' yours. 'Tis sore we've missed you in

these parts, miss, I mane me lady. Sorra a bit or sup now at Knockrea, but 'tis begrudged; ah, and the hard look and the sharp word if the master so much as ketches sight o' the poor Red Hen!"

A look of intense pity came over the beautiful face, softening all its pride, and adding to its wonderful loveliness.

"You poor old soul!" she said softly. "Of course, I remember you. And how are you? I've got a nice warm shawl for you up at the house; I'll leave word you are to have it when you call."

"Ah, hivin bless ye, me lady. Shure 'twas yerself gave me this very one I've on me at this prisint minute, and a power o' weather it's stood, and a comfort to me ivery day and night. The saints look down on ye, darlin', and may ye nivir want a bit or sup, or the kind heart to love ye, or the roof to cover ye, though 'tis throuble ye've got writ across that beautiful face. It's not goin' ye are, darlin'?"

"Yes, there's the dressing bell. But come up to the house yourself. I'll tell them to give you something. You'd like a cup of tea, wouldn't you?"

"Faix and I would, me lady, or a dhrop o' whisky if the tay wasn't handy, maybe. But shure I'm not allowed up to th' house, me darlin'. 'Tis the master's orders they say. He'll have no beggars round Knockrea; shure it's himself is the hard man, me lady, though it's not afraid ov him I am, for 'tis meself knows quite enough to throuble him when I choose to spake the wurd. But, shure, ma'am, for your sake I've held my tongue, not wantin' to bother ye. Ah, the hard man and the cruel—and 'twas yourself felt the iron hand ov him for many a year, and ye will still, darlin'. Ye will still."

Lady Ellingsworth's face grew strangely pale.

"Come, come," she said, "you mustn't talk like this. My father is strict I know, but he has good reasons. See how riotous and troublesome the people have been, and as for not coming up to the house, I'll see to that; my father won't refuse his permission while I'm there."

"Well thin, me lady, I'll take your word for it. But it's yerself and not the food I'd rather be seein'. Ah, 'tis a quare tale I could be tellin' if I was put to it, and maybe something you'd like to hear; but throth, why should I be lettin' out the saycrets o' the family? Wasn't it your mother—may the hivins be her bed this blessed night—wasn't it herself made me give the promise, and me pertindin' I didn't know the

manin' ov it? Ah, but it's tired ye look, darlin'. I'm kapin' you maybe. Ah well, human natur's a grand thing and 'tis the same wid us all whin it's dinner time, the Lord be praised for His marcies, and take the Red Hen's blessin' back wid ye, acushla, and better luck to ye than'll fall on your father's head, for 'tis meself can foresay that."

"What makes you say such things?" asked Hermia sharply. "Ever since he came here there have been nothing but warnings and prophecies of ill-luck for him. But he seems none the worse for it."

"Thru for ye, me lady, darlin', but the rain falls whin the clouds are heavy. I'm seein' them gather."

She sat down on the twisted roots of a tree near by and drew the shawl more closely over her head and shoulders, rocking herself to and fro with a strange crooning noise. Hermia knew from experience that it would be little use to try to get any more positive information from her.

She left her sitting there, and went on to the house. The dressing bell had sounded its second summons, and her maid was awaiting her. She made a very simple toilet, choosing a black gown and no jewels whatever, and then went down to the drawing-room. Her father was already there.

"You made a long stay in the grounds," he said. "It was as much as I could do to entertain Ellingsworth; consolation was, of course, impossible."

"I met one of my old pensioners," she said, "the Red Hen. She tells me you have forbidden her to come to the house. Why is that?"

"I have made a rule to have no more of these pestering beggars coming round the place," he said sharply. "They are a nuisance and a disgrace to the country. They're too lazy to work, and expect to make a livelihood out of insolence and effrontery."

"That poor old woman used to work when she could," said Hermia in a low voice. "And so little contents her."

"It is the principle of begging I object to. I have set my face against it from the hour I came to Ireland."

"I have told the old woman to come here this evening," said Hermia quietly. "I suppose I am at liberty to give her a gift for old times' sake. I brought her a shawl from England."

"Do you mean to say you remembered a creature like that?" exclaimed her father,

"Yes ; I have rather a good memory."

"So it seems." His brows clouded, his eyes grew stormy.

"Remember," he said, "this is not to be a precedent. Have you brought any more rewards for improvidence besides the one you mention?"

"Plenty," she said quietly. "But, of course, I can give them out of the house, as you object so strongly to these poor creatures."

"I do object," he said. "I had to put up with an immense amount of inconvenience once in my life. It is my hour of authority now, and I choose to exercise it in my own way."

"You will remember," she said, "that there are certain drawbacks to unpopularity in Ireland."

He smiled. "I am aware," he said, "that some men have been shot for less crimes than mine in this delightful land. But I have never gone out of my way yet for threat or persuasion of any human being. I don't intend to begin now. Besides, what should I fear? I have always been a just landlord, if not a very lenient one. I have never ejected a tenant save on strictly legal grounds, and then have offered free passage to America or England as compensation. I have paid a fair price even for worn-out land, which meant little profit to me for years to come. The better class tenantry and the neighborhood generally have applauded my efforts with wonder. I wish a few more would follow my example."

"Perhaps," she said, "they understand the poor ; you have never troubled yourself to do so. Their grievances were nothing to you but an inconvenience, their ignorance was nothing but a crime. I too understand them, father ; I have seen their life as you have never seen it or would care to see it. I marvel at their patience, I marvel at their endurance. The Irish peasant is the outcome of centuries of repression and oppression, of priest-ridden superstition and priest-fostered ignorance. Their finest moral qualities have never been encouraged, their strength and honesty never recognized. With moral virtues as with physical powers, once their use is restricted they become useless."

"Oh," he said, with that cynical tone she so hated. "It is almost as good as a Blue Book to hear you. Ellingsworth could not do better than get you to coach him in Irish politics."

"What's that about politics?" asked Ellingsworth himself, who had just entered,

"I was complimenting your wife on her championship of the lower orders," said Mr. Marsden.

"Oh, she's awfully good to beggars," said Lord Ellingsworth. "The drunken creatures and organ grinders and dirty children seem to spot her as a goddess of charity."

"Indiscriminate charity is one of the greatest evils of our social system," said Mr. Marsden pompously.

"Dinner is served, sir," announced the butler.

CHAPTER IX.

THE two women sitting opposite one another in the cool shady drawing-room of Knockrea were of decidedly opposite types. One face was full of nervous energy and changeful expression, the other of physical beauty defying criticism, and with strange, unrevealing eyes that seemed to hold a secret of their own.

The warm interest, mutually inspired at first sight, had abolished most of the reserve as well as the conventionality of a "first call." Mrs. Montessor was sipping tea, and giving her impressions of Irish society. She had traveled much and seen much. She had an intense appreciation of all things beautiful—an intense sympathy for all things sorrowful.

"Here," she said, "I am struck perpetually by the humor and pathos of life—the content with so little, the disinclination to achieve more; to bring about a better state of things by a little more energy and self-reliance."

"The poorer classes have never been taught to be self-reliant," said Lady Ellingsworth. "They see everything through the eyes of the priest and take everything to the confessional. Our servants are only spies, and our tenants are encouraged in anarchy and revolt by the very class who preach peace and goodwill to all. It has often struck me that if the Catholic Church is as infallible as it professes to be, it might surely do without such weapons as physical force and moral coercion. Its own strength should be sufficient to prove its own doctrines. Unfortunately the results of the latter are a striking contradiction to the merits of the former."

"I am not at all prejudiced as to any special form of religion," said Mrs. Montessor. "It is the spirit underlying it that I look for. Abroad I used to go to the Romish Church because I liked the music. Here I go to the English because I prefer the ritual. There is, of course, no special efficacy in either. Nothing would ever convince me that my salvation depended on a creed, or could be brought about by any other mortal."

"How do you like Mr. Kilmayne?" asked Lady Ellingsworth,

"Oh, we have wonderful controversies," she answered. "He says my views are too advanced for him. One of the drawbacks of living in the country is that your attendance at church becomes a social keynote to your respectability. I suppose you have discovered that, Lady Ellingsworth?"

"Yes. It is as unfortunate to have a position to uphold, as an example to set."

"Regular attendance at church' might be the inscription on many a tombstone," remarked Mrs. Montessor. "How one wonders whether the passport brought admission into the courts of heaven!"

There was a brief silence. Both faces had grown thoughtful. Lady Ellingsworth inquired if her visitor knew Dublin at all.

"Only to the extent of a few dinner parties," said Mrs. Montessor, with her brilliant smile. "One was an experience I shall never forget. The lady was extremely anxious to pose as a veritable *grande dame*. She used everlasting flowers for floral decorations, and wore cotton-back satin with the air of a duchess. The dinner had a certain air of the confectioner's assistance in its *entrées* and flavorings. But the incident that amused me was a little dialogue between the hostess herself and an improvised footman. She was sitting languidly back in her chair when the somewhat awkward servitor handed her a dish of tartlets. 'Ah—h—what are these, Callaghan?' she inquired frigidly. 'Threepence a-piece, ma'am. Didn't I tell ye when I brought them this morning?' was the somewhat unexpected answer. The frown on the good lady's brow was quite lost on the unfortunate man, but I had a distinct vision of reprisals in store for him."

Lady Ellingsworth smiled.

"As a rule," she said, "Irishwomen are not given to 'posing,' but I suppose they occasionally fall into temptation. My experience has been more of the 'free and easy' style of entertainment. Do you know Mrs. O'Brien? she lives at Shirley, that pretty house just before you come to the town."

"No, I have not met her yet."

"Well, the last time I called she had a roomful of visitors, and she only keeps one servant, as much a character in her way as her mistress. This was what we heard: 'Biddy, is that tea ever coming?' called out from the drawing-room door. 'Faith, ma'am, 'tis the kittle won't bile since the fire's out.' Mrs. O'Brien to guests: 'Ah, there now, my dears, the fool-

ish old woman has let out the fire. Never mind, what would we be botherin' with tea for? Ah, have a drop of whisky; that will do just as well. Biddy, never mind the kettle, bring up the whisky.' 'Whisky, is it? Shure, now ye know ye had the last dhrop last night yourself, and what ye left I'm just after giving Andy the Hopper this blessed minnit!'"

"Is there a climax?" asked Mrs. Montessor laughing.

"Oh, she wasn't a bit abashed. 'Well, I've done my best for ye,' she said genially. 'I forgot to lock the sideboard this morning; you see the result.' And none of us thought any the worse of her for it."

"Of course not. The Irish only fail when they try to be superficial. As long as they are their real selves we accept, excuse, or admire them as we never accept or admire any other nation."

"I feel so sorry for this country," said Lady Ellingsworth presently. "All my sympathies are with it. Their brains, their temperament, their soil, should make them rich and prosperous if they would only use them with a little more common sense, and a little less superstition."

"That is exactly my opinion. Laws have been made for them, aid devised for them, counsel, help, instruction alike offered them; and yet they are still turbulent, still unmanageable, still the slaves of old prejudices and the victims of bigotry and lawlessness—always their own worst enemies—now, as in those awful penal days whose memory lies like a dark and fearful blot on their history as a nation."

"There are so many burning issues abroad in the world now," said Lady Ellingsworth, "that I marvel to find everything in Ireland so little changed. In England the cry of the masses is for social light and liberty of thought. Here no one seeks any change, any remedy for old grievances, any outlet for new ambitions. No one will tell this unhappy land how best to help herself. They leave her thus, ignorant, helpless, to her priests on the one hand, and her iconoclasts on the other."

"And yet for a people so faithful, so warm-hearted, so easily led, it ought to be easy to find a leader; one who would touch their hearts and fire their imaginations, and raise the dreadful cloud from above their heads that has kept them so long in darkness."

"Leaders are not so easy to find. I mean, of course, the true sort. Men who would be disinterested and capable, who would act for the sake of right, and bring out, by sheer force

of example, as well as teaching, the worth and zeal that now lie dormant in this long-oppressed and long-misunderstood race."

Mrs. Montessor half rose from her seat. "You should get your husband to plead their cause, guided by your instincts," she said.

"Oh, don't go yet," pleaded Lady Ellingsworth. "If you only knew how I have enjoyed talking to you——"

Mrs. Montessor reseated herself. "I am paying you a long visit," she said. "Still, it is so pleasant to find a kindred spirit that I am easily persuaded, you see."

"I wonder," said Lady Ellingsworth, "if I lived here—if you—if we——"

"I know what you mean. If our influence would benefit even a small section of this down-trodden community. Ah, I fear not: at least, not yet. There is that one inherent obstacle—we are Protestants."

"Oh, that old prejudice!" cried Lady Ellingsworth impatiently.

"Yes, it is an old prejudice, but all religion is full of prejudices."

"Say rather the teachers of all religion," said Lady Ellingsworth. "As if we could make people good by keeping them ignorant! Yet that is what the Church has always tried to do. Mankind have had to fight their way against its opposing influence from the very beginning. I often wonder, are priests so afraid of the truth that they will never argue—only command and threaten?"

"'By their fruits ye shall know them,'" murmured Judith Montessor. Hermia's eyes kindled.

"That is true," she said. "The fruits of evil teaching, the narrow petty bondages of the soul to a degrading superstition. Do you know," she went on, her voice softening, "I have often thought that these so-called souls of humanity hold within themselves the power to become immortal? I mean that good and evil are fairly balanced, and if they cultivate the good it will vanquish the evil, and by vanquishing it have strength to live on; if, on the other hand, evil conquers the said soul, it sickens and dies just as our bodies die of physical disease."

"You don't believe in universal immortality, then?"

"I see no use in it. Nothing vicious or useless ought to survive a certain period: the period of trial."

"I see what you mean," said Mrs. Montessor thoughtfully. "It is a sensible theory, though an unorthodox one. Even Nature destroys what is feeble or unfruitful, but religion holds out hope even to the worst. Would you deny the possibility of amendment?"

"No, I would only continue the text we originally took for discussion—'Can men gather grapes of thorns, or fig of thistles?'"

"But the thorns and the thistles may have a use?"

"To lacerate our flesh, and to feed—donkeys!" laughed Hermia. "There is something in that."

"Oh, my dear!" said Mrs. Montessor gravely, "until humanity is wise enough to judge for itself of its own needs, and its own capacity for answering those needs, so long will religion be at the mercy of creeds and ceremonies."

"And yet," said Hermia, "we are so weak. There are times when our own helplessness is so pitiable, our own need of guidance so great, that we would make but a poor use of individual freedom."

"Yet it is always ours—always. No one can take it from us, even if we don't recognize the worth of its possession or let it rust in self-blind disuse. Deep in the heart, in the soul, it lies, speaking plain enough when we choose to hear. But we let the world drown its voice with other cries, and then believe we are deaf. I would like to say something to you—I don't know if it would help you in any way, I only know it has often helped me. It was something I read once when I was a girl. I never forget it."

"Tell me," said Lady Ellingsworth.

"It was to this effect. 'All philosophy, all religious codes, all the wisdom of the wisest, all the science of the scientist, can only teach you to find yourself.' Just yourself, always and only yourself. You try to get away from it but you can't—to distrust it, to kill it even. But it is useless. It comes back to the puppets of pleasure, it comes back to the drunkard's dazed brain, it comes back to the suicide's wretched soul. From the gates of heaven, from the flames of hell (if there be a hell apart from our remorse and misery) it comes back; it must come back. It is our heritage. It is the meaning of life and the mystery of death—just yourself."

Lady Ellingsworth's beautiful face had grown strangely pale.

"And to think that helps you," she faltered. "Oh, to me it sounds terrible, terrible."

Judith Montessor looked at her half pityingly, half kindly.

"Ah, you beautiful proud thing," she said in her heart, "there is something in your life of which you are afraid."

But she only took the slender white hand in both her own, and said gently: "You won't be afraid always. The more you think of it the more it teaches, the more it helps you."

Their eyes met. In Hermia's was a certain soft wistfulness new to them. "I hope," she said, "I shall see you often. I have never had a friend—a woman friend—who seemed to me on a higher level than her gowns or her social success had placed her. You are so different."

Mrs. Montessor smiled.

"I am not so different," she said. "I am only candid. I always speak what I think. It is the only sort of courage a woman is allowed. I hope, in a not far distant future, she will make a better use of that privilege than she has done hitherto."

"You do not believe in the submissive attitude for woman?"

"I think a woman's real submission should spring out of her recognized authority."

"Ah!" said Lady Ellingsworth, "your married experience must have been a happy one."

She was startled at the expression that leapt into the clear eyes into which she looked.

"Happy!" and Mrs. Montessor turned away. "Ah," she said, "there are things we women have to bear, of which we never speak, because we dare not. No, my experience has not been happy, Lady Ellingsworth. If it had, I should never have learnt to think."

CHAPTER X.

LADY ELLINGSWORTH sat for long that night brooding over those last words.

Was it only unhappiness that taught women to think—that lifted them above the mere level of commonplace or luxurious surroundings? Was the inner life, the life that one's heart alone knew, the real life after all, and the other that the world saw a mere series of phantoms and phantasmagoria, unsatisfactory as well as unreal?

The look in that woman's eyes, the ring of truth in her voice, haunted her. She had never met any one like her. Here at least was no puppet of fashion, living for her own petty triumphs and imagining the world had been created as a posing place for her social successes. Here was one who had suffered, thought, worked out life's problem for herself.

"I think she would be a friend worth the name." So ran her reflections. "A friend—Ah! how often I have wanted one. I wonder if she would be the same, *if she knew*."

She started. A wave of color rose to her face. She heard a step without, and knew her hour of peace and self-communion was over. She rose, and the warm soft stream of her loosened hair covered her like a mantle. As she saw herself in the glass a shudder shook her from head to foot. "Oh!" she cried, in the vain passion of a useless protest, "why did I do it, why did I marry him? Better a life of anguish and humiliation than a living lie. Oh! what fetters I have forged for myself, and I can never break them now."

There was a look in her eyes more pathetic than tears. Tears are a woman's safeguard, the relief of overstrained tension. But here was only anguish, terrible and enduring, the sign of suffering unspeakable, the shame of something never to be undone. That is what makes life so terrible when we have reached the stage of looking back. The clearness with which we see the error that has altered everything—the little slip, the chance word, the foolish kiss, and then all has gone wrong since, and never a chance again of retrieving the slip, of withdrawing the word, of recalling the kiss.

Hermia coiled up her rich loose hair, and turned away from the glass which had shown her to herself unmasked. "God! who made women, why did you give them hearts?" she cried to that self.

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The intimacy between Hermia and Judith Montessor grew apace during the next two weeks. It was the subject of much discussion among other social lights in the neighborhood, and of some petulant jealousy on the part of Lord Ellingsworth himself. He had come to this quiet retreat with honeymoon proclivities, and an idea that he would have his wife all to himself, as had hitherto been impossible in the swing and rush of many "seasons" and at many fashionable places, and the demands on his own time and attention caused by such peremptory masters as the House of Lords and the training stables.

But these three weeks he had promised himself were to be altogether different. He and his wife would be together without any of their worldly acquaintances to distract, or bore, or claim them, as the case might be. Together in a humdrum *bourgeois* fashion in an out-of-the-way Irish village. It would not be exciting, but it would be infinitely delightful, for he was still in love, and still found an absorbing interest in studying his wife. He was intensely proud of her. Being a stupid, honest-hearted, easily contented man himself, he had a supreme admiration for intellectual qualities in others. To him Hermia had always been more or less of a puzzle. But he was content to take her as she was, and leave time to work out the solution.

It struck him as rather hard therefore that, instead of the peace and the *solitude à deux* he had promised himself, he should have dropped into a hornet's nest of claimants on his wife. Old friends, old scenes, tenants, peasants, beggars—there seemed no end to them all!

He had found her giving a tea in the village to the most extraordinary set of beggars it had ever been his lot to behold. They were the characteristic crew of licensed beggars known by such names as "The Foreign Rushes," who sold brooms; "The Red Hen," who had never been seen without a red shawl over her head, and possessed a face like a barn door fowl; "Andy the Hopper," who was lame and

made a livelihood by singing patriotic ballads in a wheezy, broken-down voice; "The Mouse," a little, barefooted woman, with tiny, childlike features and small, red, restless eyes; one special character, the head and queen of them all, who rejoiced in the appellation of "The Swan," and was famous for interlarding her conversation with the longest and most inappropriate words that memory or a quick ear could furnish.

Lord Ellingsworth did not feel at all pleased to see his wife at the head of the table, dispensing tea and comestibles to such guests. He stood at the doorway of the little kitchen secured for the occasion, and surveyed the scene with a sort of good-humored disgust.

"The Swan," Johanna Reardon by name, who considered herself mistress of the ceremonies, rose as soon as she observed him, and made a low obeisance.

"Good-day to your honor's lordship," she said with extreme politeness. "It's wishing you long life and prosperous succession we are, and your honored lady, too. And the blessing o' heaven upon you both, for 'tis your good lady, your honor, that has the kind and rememberful heart, and notwithstanding the disparagement of station between us, a warm welcome to yez both, one and all. Where's yer manners, ye crathurs? Don't ye see his honor's grace standin' beyont, and ye all as dumb as door-posts! Git up wid ye and give him the wurd o' welcome, as I've bin showing you the etiquette of doin' this blessed minnit."

But Ellingsworth had fled, and his wife had to explain that not being used to Irish ways and customs he could not understand what was meant.

Indeed, the close atmosphere of the kitchen, and the hubbub of tongues, were beginning to be a little too much for herself. Having seen the provisions well under weigh, she rose from her seat, and desiring Johanna Reardon to preside in her stead, she slipped out and left them to their own devices.

"Poor souls!" she thought, "a cup of tea, a shawl, an ounce of snuff, and they'll be eternally grateful. What a strange life, what limited capacity—and they are women, like myself."

She caught sight of her husband a few yards in advance. He was strolling slowly along. The look of his back seemed expressive of ill-humor to Hermia's eyes. "I

suppose he is cross," she said. "I had better join him—not that it's any use to explain. He's like my father, he won't even try to understand."

She quickened her pace and soon caught him up. The gloom of his face changed slightly as she reached his side.

"Why did you go, Ellingsworth?" she asked. "If you had said a word or two they would have been so pleased, poor souls!"

"I really must draw the line at characters," he said. "They looked so awful, and were so dirty. I couldn't bear to see you there."

"It was only once," she said. "We leave in a few days, and it may be years before I come back here again. Besides, I like to think I have given a little pleasure to somebody."

"I wish you would give me a little, in the shape of your company," he said. "I never seem to see you now."

She looked at him in surprise. "My dear Ellingsworth, why, we are in danger of boring one another with too much of each other's society. It seems quite funny, only our two selves staying at Knockrea. I felt sure papa would have asked some other people."

She did not like to say that she found the burden of supporting the conversation and the company of her father and himself night after night something of an ordeal. There had been times when she cared nothing for hurting his feelings, but that had been before she knew Judith Montessor. It was curious how often she found herself dating new emotions and sympathies from the birth of that friendship.

She had always known that it cost her a distinct effort to listen to her husband. Now she felt the effort was becoming a strain, and yet she nerved herself against self-betrayal.

He went on with a series of half-petulant, half-unreasonable complaints that seemed to her almost childish.

"Oh, my dear Arthur!" she exclaimed at last. "What are you saying? Surely we see quite enough of one another. The truth is, you miss your horses and your trainer, and all that perpetual fuss about early gallops and 'mashes' and oats that I used to hear. If you want amusement, why don't you go about and get statistics for the House of the state of Ireland? If you ask the people

themselves you will get such information as no Blue Book ever contained."

"I can't understand a word they say," said Lord Ellingsworth.

She smiled involuntarily. "Shall I look upon you as representative?" she asked. "I begin to understand now why it is English people have such a wonderful amount of knowledge respecting this country!"

"Oh, of course, we haven't Irish enthusiasm to help us out. Though why you're all so deucedly proud of being Irish beats me. I'd take my choice of any other nation on the face of the earth before this!"

"That is very like my father," she said, "and a very bad compliment to me, Ellingsworth."

"Oh, my darling," he said with ready compunction, "of course, I didn't mean that! You are different to any other woman; you stand quite apart from them in my sight. Oh, did you see that child, Hermia? What a lovely face!"

He stopped abruptly. They were passing Jim Maguire's cottage. In the doorway stood Kitty. She wore the scarlet frock, her hair was like burnished gold about her shoulders, her dark, glowing eyes and ruby lips made up a picture of wonderful color and wonderful beauty.

"Well, Kitty," said Lady Ellingsworth, "where have you been all this long time? I haven't seen you in the village at all."

The child approached the broken railings.

"I've been away," she said; "away to the sea yonder, with Biddy."

"And what's your name?" asked Lord Ellingsworth, taking a half-crown from his pocket. He had discovered it to be a talisman that unlocked tongues and secured unlimited blessings and information.

"I'm Kitty the Rag."

"Why Rag?" inquired Lord Ellingsworth facetiously. "That pretty frock doesn't deserve such a nickname I'm sure."

She glanced at him with fine contempt. "'Tis the first dainty frock I've ever had," she said. "But it won't be the last. I'm goin' to a grand school and to be educated and brought up fine, like a noble lady."

"Oh," said Lord Ellingsworth, "is that your ambition? Who's going to educate you—your mother?"

"Is it Biddy? Faith no, sir, I've no noble mother. No, it's

the gentleman up yonder at Knockrea who's given her the money ; she tould me so herself."

"My father!" exclaimed Lady Ellingsworth in astonishment.

"Whew!" whistled her husband, pursing up his mouth. "Blows the wind thus, pretty Kitty? I thought there was something a little above the ordinary cut about you."

Lady Ellingsworth's face grew scarlet. She turned abruptly away. Her husband tried to slip the coin into the child's sunburnt hand.

She drew back. "I don't want money," she said. "Biddy has always told me never to take what I don't earn."

Lord Ellingsworth laughed somewhat brutally. "Oh, you'll earn enough some day, I make no doubt," he said, and he followed his wife, smiling oddly at his own thoughts.

The child watched them both. "So that's her man," she said. "Well, he may be a gran' gentleman and a rich, but, faith! I don't think much of his manners!"

Meanwhile Hermia was hurrying along, her face still hot with that shamed flush; her brain afire with sudden indignation. That look and laugh of Ellingsworth's had opened up an avenue of suspicion, through which her thoughts flew in wild confusion. The strange beauty of this child, her words, her ambition to rise above her present surroundings, all lent themselves to the same interpretation. For her father to act in a manner so contradictory to his rules meant some very strong interest in this half-wild, lovely creature. When Ellingsworth joined her, the curious smile on his lips struck her like a fresh insult. He looked at her in a way that was more eloquent than speech.

"A queer incident," he said. "But I suppose Irish morals are much the same as those of other nations. The child is a rare beauty, at all events. Did you see any—any likeness?"

"No!" she said with sudden, cold anger. "Nor do I suppose that a little charitable interest is as uncommon as you seem to imagine."

"Not the interest," he said. "I did not mean that; but her words—that she was to be educated and brought up as a lady—what of them? And what of the benefactor, who, with all his prejudices against the lower classes, chooses to transform a beggar into a civilized being?"

"I see nothing so extraordinary in it. The child is not of

common appearance. He may have felt as interested in her as you and I have done."

"But would you or I lift her above her station, my dear Hermia, and sow discontent in her innocent soul? I think not."

She was silent for a moment. "I think myself it is an unwise proceeding," she said at length. "Wild flowers are best left in their own soil."

"I quite agree with you, but when there has already been a little 'grafting' done, the result is a blend of culture. However, I admire your father's *protégée* immensely. I shall feel quite interested in results."

"I should not advise you to speak to him on the subject," she said coldly. "He is not a man who brooks interference."

"I know that," said Lord Ellingsworth. "Oh! I had no intention of intruding our discovery upon him. After all, it is his own concern."

CHAPTER XI.

"WHAT were you spakin' to the gintleman about?" asked the dalin' woman as she came suddenly out of the cottage.

"I was only telling him my name," said Kitty.

"You didn't say a wuurd about what I've tould ye, eh, Kitty agra? I said ye wos to kape your tongue still."

"Faith, then, I did tell him, and the lady, too. I won't be looked down upon by the likes of them, so I tell you straight."

"Ah, Kitty, 'tis you are the proud one and the hard one. Sorra a bit ye care for poor Biddy or any one else in the place! I wish ye weren't so mighty boastful, child. 'Tisn't becomin' to ye, no more's the pride ov ye. For 'tis meself knows you've no right to a name at all, and thim's not the sort that makes gran' ladies."

The child flashed round on her like a little whirlwind. "How dare you say that? I'll have a name, right or no right. If you hadn't done what I axed ye to do I'd have run away; I'd have worked for meself; I wouldn't have stayed here and lived this life any longer."

Biddy looked at her reproachfully. "Whisht ye, child, don't be after spakin' like that. The Lord knows what will become ov ye at all, at all. Come in now to your supper, for faith 'tis Johanna Reardon I'm seein' comin' up the sthreet, and if she stops here to gossip, wid her talk and her long wuurds, 'twill be night intirely before we get through, and I'm after bakin' a griddle cake or two for ye, avic. So in wid ye at onst."

The Swan was sailing gracefully up the street, her basket of wares under her shawl.

This curious fraternity of beggars had each an ostensible means of livelihood, which deluded no one but themselves, but kept them within strictly legal bounds. One sold apples or nuts, another sweets, another pins and tapes. Their stock-in-trade seemed as undiminishable as the widow's cruse of old, still it was profitable enough to themselves.

When Johanna reached the Maguires' cottage she marched up to the door and looked in,

"God save all here, and good-day to ye! Shure it's quite a stranger ye are, Mrs. Maguire. Ah, 'tis well to have the pecuniary assistance of the quality—and a great matther, too! I s'pose ye've heard ov the superfluous banquet we're after havin' from Miss Hermia that was, bless her kind heart! Oh! 'twas luxurious in the supreme, I do assure ye. 'Twould be hard to find a name for it. I was wondering not to see ye there partaking ov the counstibles!"

"I'm not much acquainted wid the lady," said Biddy shortly, "and I'm not beholden to charity yet, ma'am, for the bit or sup."

"Ah, faith," said the Swan, bridling, "'tis yourself is the proud woman, Mrs. Maguire, don't we all know it? though your family's come down in the world by a gination or two. Ah, 'tis the fine pedigree you have, and the comfortable circumstances you're in. Shure it doesn't take me two eyes to see the pictures* hangin' up in yer palatial kitchen."

"Will ye come in and take a seat?" asked Biddy.

"I'm not disinclined to accept that same offer," said the Swan, "and perhaps we may be doin' a little bit o' huckstering prisintly. Why, Kitty child, 'tis mighty gran' ye are. Who's bin dressin' ye up like a Saint Bridget? We'll not be callin' ye Kitty the Rag any longer, for want o' a more becomin' title."

"Niver mind my dress; tell me about the tea party," said Kitty. "Was the lady there herself?"

"She was, and as purlite and demonsthtrative in the recip-tion ov us as a lady could be."

"And what did ye have?"

"Have, is it? ah, 'twas grand if ye like. There was mate, and mate, and three kinds o' mate, and lashins ov confectionery and cakes, and presarves in glass dishes—oh, mighty grand, I assure ye—and the tay that strong ye might have got dhrunk on it if ye was inebriatedly inclined. Oh, 'twas a fine faste intirely! I wonder ye didn't drop in, Kitty child. There's hapes o' childer there now, devouring ov the fragmints that remain, and, indade, 'twas the Red Hen I caught fillin' up her basket with ivery bit she could lay her hands on. Demaning ov yerself, I says. I'd be ashamed to do the likes o' that. But here's a bit ov cake for ye, child, that just dropped into me own bosket promiscuous like."

* Hams and bacon.

She lifted a corner of her shawl, revealing a well-stocked basket that contained a fair amount of the despised "frag-mints." Biddy pushed back her chair, and suggested business.

"What sort o' article might ye be wantin', Johanna?" she asked.

"Well, 'twas a little bit ov a skirt I was thinkin' of," said Johanna. "Maybe ye've been re-exportatin' somethin' o' the sort lately."

Biddy produced a bundle from a dark cupboard, and began to display its contents. Kitty, not feeling interested in the haggling and criticism that ensued, walked off down the street in the direction of the cottage where the famous tea party had been held.

She met the guests straggling along the village street, vociferous as inmates of a turkey-yard, and comparing notes on the various stages of "fulness" they had achieved, and all more or less possessed by a certain abdominal pride that was frankly demonstrated.

They stopped to admire Kitty's appearance, and to administer counsel which had the sins and snares of vanity as a text.

Kitty was not appreciative, however, and left them with scant ceremony, and less character. Their counsels changed to prophecies, and the child had evidently a most untoward fate before her, judging from the prophets.

Happily for her, she was as much without faith as without feeling. Having always been more or less of an outcast, she was more resentful of treatment than sensitive to it. She marched along with her head in the air, her scarlet frock fluttering, and her rich locks flying about her shoulders, a picture of untamed beauty that appealed even to her persecutors.

"She's just aten up wid pride and concait, the crathur!" they said, but the child was well out of hearing, and cared nothing for their opinions.

The scene of the tea party was a scene of confusion now, for a number of the children had elected to make free with the remains, and were scrambling for cakes and lumps of sugar, and smearing themselves with jam, and generally enjoying themselves in a squashed and uproarious manner.

Kitty surveyed them with unmitigated contempt. "Ah, ye pack o' greedy blayguards! One 'ud think ye'd niver seen a bit ov food from Monday till Saturday!" she cried.

They turned on her and began an odd mixture of expletives

and execrations that in times of yore had often resulted in a free fight. But the dignity inspired by her scarlet frock and her new prospects came to Kitty's aid.

She only relieved her feelings by a few choice bits of "strong" Irish, and then marched off, leaving them in happy possession of fragments more or less delectable.

She took a field path and followed it up for a long distance, skirting the fast-ripening grain, and only stopping now and then to gather the flaring scarlet poppies. She wanted to be alone. She wanted to think of the new change so soon to alter all her life, and all her preconceived ideas.

Any one looking at her would have felt that it would be no easy task to tutor her in a domestic atmosphere. There was something wild and untamable about her; her eyes had the glow of eyes that meet one in the shadows of forest leaves, in the caged bondage of *Thier Garten* or menagerie. Their vivid glare and brilliance was suggestive of innate rebellion against the control and restrictions of social life. She had been a liliputian scourge in the village ever since she could raise her voice and her hands in juvenile warfare. She had always been a prominent, though never a popular, element in it. Now she almost wondered at the distaste she felt for those bold-faced, ragged urchins. She was conscious of a craving for a future in all respects different to this past; of unshaped ambitions, of unachieved deeds. She seemed to sight a rich argosy of possibilities on the horizon of childhood. There were no words to describe it, no experience to express it. It might turn out a crazy wreck, it might contain a priceless cargo.

She stopped at last and threw herself down amidst the rich waving grain, her hands clasped behind her head, her eyes on the blue sky above, where a few tiny clouds were drifting like scattered rose-leaves. The peace and silence around appealed by the attraction of contrast to her turbulent nature. The calm was so intense, it soothed her as the touch of a cool hand soothes a hot brow.

"They say God lives up there," so ran her thoughts. "God who knows everything. Then He knows who I am. . . Ah, but it's so far away He is, and the blessed Mary too. They might as well be dumb and deaf for all the sign they make. I wonder if it's thrue what the priests say, all ov it. Maybe they've just made it up. What do they tell us? What good is the holy water? Shure it's niver taken a drop

o' wickedness out ov me, nor made Jim give up his dhrink or his lazy ways, nor stopped any ov the thaivin' or lyin' that goes on in the village. And the candles agin? What does God or the saints want us to be burnin' candles for, when onst the poor souls are dead and gone? Shure, if they're in another world how can they see thim at all? Oh! I'm just tired o' puzzlin' it all out. Maybe they'll tache me better where I'm goin' to next. I want to know so badly. It's just *in* me; I can't help it, nor spake of it. Only I want to know, and I mane to."

She lay there for long; so long that the light had died out of the sky, and a soft rain began to fall in the twilight. But the child only lifted her flushed face thirstily to the glittering drops. Rain and mist and sunshine half commingled made the moist air she had always remembered as her own special climate. Bareheaded she went homewards in that soft veiling drizzle—caring nothing that her hair was wet, and her frock soaked.

Biddy was standing by the door knitting. She had tidied up the kitchen and completed her "deal" with Johanna Reardon, and seen Jim depart to his favorite haunt, and had leisure now to vex herself with anxiety on Kitty's account.

"Shure and I know it's not ov much account to worry over the weather," she said, glancing at the darkening sky. "Still the child would be better indoors. But, there, what's the use ov talkin' at all? She's the wild slip and always will be, and havin' her own way since the first moment her tongue could spake the will ov her! Ah, wisha-wisha! 'tis well we're not cut all out in the same pattern, let the prastes talk as they may. We can't feel alike, nor spake alike, nor think alike, and a blessed thing we can't either; and sure, 'tis the blessed Lord made us so, for though water is water, there's a mighty great difference between the say and the duckpond yonder. Ah, and here's Kitty herself—the nager. And dhrippin' wet, too. Where have you been, child?"

"Only in the fields beyant. I lay down and fell aslape," said Kitty, shaking herself like a water spaniel.

"Come in and dhry yourself, alannah. Himself is out—goin' to a matin' yonder."

"Which manes he'll come home dhrunk, and abuse ye, Biddy."

"Thru for ye, darlin'. 'Tis poor luck I've had with the crathur, for all he seemed a dacent sort o' lad whin I married

him. Ah, Kitty aroon, wimmin has a bad time ov it one way and another; a hard time intirely, what wid their husbands and their children, and the throubles o' life. Oh, dear, dear, 'tis wonderin' why we're born at all I am. Oh! I wish that drunken fool ov a man would come home, Kitty. It's not so often I'm there that he should be laivin' me alone in this fashion."

"Biddy," said the child abruptly, "where's your son? Why doesn't he come home and help ye?"

"Eugene, is it? Ah, the fine handsome lad he was, and niver an hour's trouble to me since the hour he was born, the saints be praised. Ah, 'tis far over the says he is, darlin', hundreds ov miles away. He's makin' his fortune, I've no doubt, and thin he'll come home to me."

"Why did you let him go?" asked the child curiously.

"'Twas for his own good, and by the advice ov the praste. He's gone now, the saints reward him! Shure he was the dacentest man in the seven parishes, and that help to Eugene wid his schoolin'. For he was mighty clever, and wid a voice—Ah, Kitty, 'twould wile the heart out ov a stone."

She wiped her eyes. It always upset her to talk of her boy, the idol of her heart, the bright, buoyant youth who had sailed away from this land eight long years ago.

"Why doesn't he write?" continued the child curiously. "Surely he could do that."

"God between us and all harm!" cried Biddy, crossing herself with fervor. "Shure, child, that's what me poor heart has been axin' all these weary years. But there's no knowin'. He may be among the goldfields, or the nigger folk, and niver a post office or a dacint shop in the whole country. In course then he couldn't be writin' to any one. Oh, I must just be patient, Kitty child. God will send him back maybe before me ould eyes close for iver, and so I just do my work, and I won't be after makin' a banshee o' myself, though I could do it with a whole heart this present minnit."

She rose from her seat, and dried her eyes vigorously. "Come along now, Kitty child," she said, "'tis time ye was in bed and gettin' a good slape before himself comes in with his ballyhoolin' and rantin'. Faith he's the dhrunken disgrace to be a dacint woman's husband, though I'd not be sayin' it to any one but you, Kitty avick."

"Why don't you go away?" asked the child. "Why do

wimmin live with bad husbands? 'Tis foolish. I wouldn't do it."

"Faith and ye would, darlin', if ye had one. 'Tis the will ov the Lord, and we must put up wid it. Shure don't the prastes tell us that whin they marry us?"

"The prastes—always the prastes," said Kitty contemptuously. "Why should we be mindin' ivery word they say? 'Tis too frightened o' prastes ye all are, Biddy, and small good they do ye. Why should they be havin' the ear o' God any more than ourselves?"

"Oh, whisht, whisht," said Biddy affrightedly. "'Tis a sin to talk like that, child; and Father Egan will be putting a pinnince on ye, av he hears ov it."

"I don't care for his pinnince or himself," answered the child audaciously, "and as for sending ye to purgatory, as Pat O'Grady says they can, well I'm thinkin' God will settle where we're to go, and not be wantin' a praste to tell Him His own duties!"

With which heretical declaration she flung herself out of the little dark kitchen and went up to her loft, leaving Biddy in a state of dismayed wonder.

"The saints presarve us, what's come to the child at all! How did she get hould ov such idays? Shure, 'tis that old blayguard of a Jim has been gettin' ear ov her. Bedad, it's a terrible thing to be a dimmygog, as Johanna Reardon called the man this blessed night! And I not to know the manin' ov the wuurd, and she givin' it the lingth and breadth ov her tongue wid all the assurance ov a scholar. Not but I pertinded it was a dacent sort o' wuurd enough, and a great help to his spechifying. Shure, didn't Father Egan say in his sermon av Sunday morning, 'A fellow-feelin' makes us powerful kind'? And that's throe enough!"

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. MONTRESSOR was dining at Knockrea in company with the Kilmaynes and Dr. Carrick. On the morrow the Ellingsworths were leaving Ireland.

The two friends were talking earnestly together by the open window. Mrs. Kilmayne sat turning over an album by a table a short distance off.

"I am so sorry to go—so sorry to leave you," said Lady Ellingsworth. "It has been a new life to me here. You have done me so much good."

Judith Montessor looked fondly at the beautiful face, softened out of all its pride and coldness by genuine emotion.

"My regrets are quite as sincere," she said. "But the autumn will soon be here, and then I am to be with you, as we have arranged. I hope you won't have a large house party, my dear. I am exacting enough to like to keep my friends to myself when I have the chance."

"They will be chiefly Ellingsworth's friends at Yarrow," said Hermia; "horsey men, and men who sum up their day's enjoyment by the bags they've made. I seldom ask more than one or two women."

"It is a long time since I've stayed in England," observed Mrs. Montessor. "Of course passing through and hotels don't count. I shall feel quite strange. There are few things more trying than to go amongst new surroundings, and people totally different to those one is accustomed to."

Lady Ellingsworth smiled. "I should fancy you would never feel strange or ill at ease anywhere," she said.

"Me dear Lady Ellingsworth, I can't find a portrait of you anywhere," interposed Mrs. Kilmayne. "There's your dear mother—how like you are to her—only her hair had more of the weave in it, and your sister that died of typhus here, before your papa got the drains to his liking. And your three brothers. Ah! 'tis sad to think they're all gone—such a fine family as ye were."

"Are all your brothers and sisters dead?" asked Judith Montessor.

“Yes, and all by accidents. It was very terrible.”

She approached the table. “No, I’m not there, Mrs. Kilmayne. I never had my photograph taken as a child.”

“But isn’t there a picture of you anywhere in the house?” asked Mrs. Montessor.

She shook her head. “No, my father never seemed to care for one. Of course I have plenty of photographs of myself at home, but he never expressed a wish for one, and so I never sent one to him.”

Mrs. Montessor looked at her thoughtfully. Mrs. Kilmayne turned over the leaves of the album and descanted on the various persons it offered for criticism.

“Ah—fashion’s a strange thing, my dear,” she said. “I remember when I was married, and the way we had our skirts cut—and plenty of fulness for the pleats—and very useful it was, for I’ve turned my own wedding gown three times. ’Twas a beautiful material—apple-blossom silk, and my dear mamma, she didn’t grudge the price of it. ‘You’re a careful girl, Clara,’ she said, ‘and it will last you five years at the least.’ ‘Five, mamma?’ I said; ‘twenty, more like.’ And I’ve got it to this day, me dear Lady Ellingsworth; and only for getting stout and not being able to match the bodice any way, I could use it still. Ah! my dears, girls were brought up to be careful in those days, and no waste or throwing things aside because of getting a bit old fashioned. And the more you wear it the better it looks. But now, I’m forgetting, times are changed. Indeed, I was saying to Mrs. Blake the other day—the Mrs. Blake at Ashford, you know, and first cousin to Major Kenealy, who, by the way, is a connection of Lord Dunsane’s by the mother’s side—well, I was telling Mrs. Blake that she encourages her daughter too much in extravagance of dress. ‘Look at my own girls,’ I said,—‘not but what they’re all married and set up for themselves now—why, one new gown a year was as much as ever they had, and a piece of muslin or print for a summer frock, and they always looked stylish.’ I daresay you remember them, Lady Ellingsworth?”

“Yes, quite well,” said Hermia, with a glance of commiseration at her friend’s bored face.

This sort of talk, as an exception, was amusing; as a rule, rather wearisome.

“Not but what you both look the pink of elegance,” continued Mrs. Kilmayne, “and ’tis quite dowdy I feel beside

you ; but then poor Edward has enough to do with his parish and his expenses, and I can't be asking him for any more new gowns in addition. Not that he'd deny me anything. He's been a good husband from the day we married up to this present moment. Ah, my dear Lady Ellingsworth, it's not many wives can say that."

Lady Ellingsworth colored slightly as she met Judith Montessor's keen eyes. She moved restlessly about the room and finally went over to the piano.

"Ah, now do sing us something—'tis quite a Grisi you are to us here!" exclaimed Mrs. Kilmayne. "I've often thought of that night I heard you—'twas beautiful. You weren't here, Mrs. Montessor. No, it was before that Sunday I introduced you to Lady Ellingsworth; little I thought what friends ye'd become—David and Jonathan in the female line, as I was saying to the vicar. Ah! that's the tune, Lady Ellingsworth. Me own dear Margaretta used to sing it when she came back from the boarding-school in Dublin—Miss Flaherty's was the name of it—ah, beautiful! beautiful!"

Her voice stilled insensibly as the chords resolved themselves into a flowing accompaniment. The sweet, pathetic air thrilled out—passionate and soul-stirring as the nightingale's own plaint of woe.

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As Lady Ellingsworth finished she found the gentlemen had left the dining-room by the window opening on to the terrace. They were standing in a group now by the open windows of the drawing-room and listening to her.

"What a grand voice," said Dr. Carrick, winking away a tear from his grey eyelashes.

"I can never get her to sing before people!" exclaimed Lord Ellingsworth; "she says it's not worth while, or they wouldn't understand, or something of that sort. I'm sure no one could help understanding her singing!"

"Or feeling it, which is more to the point," said Mr. Kilmayne. "What expression she threw into that ballad! I hope, Lord Ellingsworth, we have managed to awaken a little of your sympathy for Erin's sons and daughters. You won't go back to your more fortunate land and forget us."

He walked the young marquis off, and they strolled up and down the terrace talking earnestly, while Dr. Carrick and

Philip Marsden smoked their cigars, and listened to Mrs. Montessor interpreting the Moonlight Sonata.

Lady Ellingsworth had seated herself upon a low ottoman beside the piano, and the two talked in subdued voices as the soft melody rippled on.

"Music says so much for one," said Hermia. "It is the expression of all that is in one's soul, I think."

"Artists say it only says for us what we tell to it."

"Yes—it is a great relief."

"Now, listen to this. I'm not going on with Beethoven. I wrote it years ago, when I had dreams of being an artist. As if a woman was ever allowed to be anything, once she puts her life into the bondage of man's exactions! Tell me, does it say anything to you, Hermia?"

Hermia listened. Her face flushed slightly; her eyes grew troubled.

"There is something wild—something desperate in it," she said. "That note—it is like a cry—it is always coming in."

Mrs. Montessor nodded. "I was in Paris—the streets were a blaze of light. Men sat outside the cafés sipping absinthe, smoking, laughing and jesting. I can see it all when I play this. The green and shifting liquid in the glasses, like a snake's eye—cruel, opal, changeful: a reflection of all things evil in an evil and corrupt city. A woman's rustling skirts—the perfume of the cocotte—the light laugh—the bold, inviting look. Ah! could one breathe that atmosphere and not feel soul-soiled? Even Art was polluted. A picture gallery was to me but a revelation of an artist's impure dreams. Nature lost all beauty, all divinity. One felt that to be a woman *there* meant only one thing."

The chords crashed out stormily. That one weird *motif*, like the cry of a lost soul, thrilled out its last despairing plaint—then died into silence.

They both rose. Hermia was strangely pale. "Oh!" she cried faintly. "Was your life like that?"

"I think many women's lives are like that," said Judith Montessor bitterly. "It is hard to remain true to our best when everything tends to foster our worst. It is not only natural events that are bitter to us—time and change—but the circumstances of our daily life. And then the iron enters our souls."

"Yes," said Hermia, "and gives its coloring to them."

One seems to lose one's individuality—the effort to live a noble personal life becomes futile.”

“And our dreams seem the best part of it after all. Pity it is that men and the world so easily rob us of them. The one gives us the cares of a household—the duties of motherhood—and considers we have no further cause for discontent; the other mocks every effort—scoffs at purity, and laughs down ideals.”

“Here come our noble antagonists,” said Hermia, as the door opened.

There was no time for further confidence. The hour of parting was at hand, and that meant to-night the hour of prolonged separation.

“You won't forget—you will come to me soon?” whispered Hermia, as they said good-bye.

“Whenever you want me,” was the answer. “I do not easily forget. We Irish are only fickle when we don't care for a person. Perhaps it is to our own credit that we do care so seldom.”

.

“I should like a word with you, Hermia,” said her father, as they reëntered the drawing-room. “You will excuse a father's exactions, I am sure, Ellingsworth. What I have to say could have no possible interest for you.”

“If it is on the eternal Irish question, certainly not,” said Lord Ellingsworth good humoredly. “So I'll smoke a cigar in the billiard-room—and then go to bed.”

Hermia's face had regained its old composure—its old hardness. Experience had taught her that a *tête-à-tête* with her father was not likely to be of an agreeable nature.

He took a seat and motioned her to do the same. “I will not detain you long,” he said. “I wish merely to give you some general idea of the value of this property. You are, of course, aware that I can leave it to whom I please.”

She looked surprised. “No,” she said, “I was not aware of that. I had an idea that it was my mother's.”

“It came to her in a very roundabout way, and so burdened with mortgages that it took more than half my capital to free it. Since then I have spared no expense and no trouble to bring it into its present condition. I introduced a new system of agriculture; of drainage, planting, and fruit culture.

I tried to revive cottage industries, but I must say I failed there. These people are dormant, stagnant, and behind the times in every respect. They are admirably lazy, and admirably untruthful. They might live in industry, peace and comfort, did they but choose—but they don't choose. However, what I wish to say is this. Do not imagine that because this property came to me through your mother that I am obliged to leave it to her side of the house instead of my own. And do not, on the strength of future expectations, permit your husband to ruin himself, as he seems inclined to do. Your settlements are not exceptional, and if you have no children the property, of course, goes to the next male heir—a cousin of Ellingsworth's, I believe."

"May I ask," she said, "why you are telling me all this?"

"More as a warning than anything else. You are both young. You are both reckless in the matter of expenditure. But money doesn't last for ever—especially with two such establishments as yours in Park Lane and Yorkshire. If a smash ever occurs, remember I foresaw it and forewarned you."

Hermia laughed.

"I think your prognostications are hardly likely to be realized," she said. "Ellingsworth is extravagant, I know, but still he is enormously rich."

"I beg your pardon," corrected her father coldly. "He was enormously rich—he is not so at the present moment."

"Well, rich enough for all intents and purposes," she said indifferently. "If that is all you have to say, father, I will wish you good-night. I am rather tired, and we have a long journey before us to-morrow."

She rose and yawned slightly behind her delicate white hand.

He looked at her with the same chill smile on his lips that had of late so often dwelt there.

"Good-night," he said. "I am glad your marriage has turned out so well. Ellingsworth is really a model husband."

Her brow contracted slightly. "He has many virtues that other men lack," she said.

"Is jealousy among them? If so I should advise you not to give him cause. Of course, nowadays, sensible people don't elevate matrimony into a sacrament. It is simply a contract for mutual advantage. Love lies far apart from it."

He saw her face pale suddenly. Their eyes met. "I—I wish I could understand you," she said. "You speak as if I were a stranger to you. You have always treated me as if—as

if I were not your child at all. Why is it? What has been my fault? I am not speaking of—of that piece of folly now. I mean long before, when I was but a little child running wild here—no one's charge—no one's care."

Her voice broke. Tears rushed to the beautiful, proud eyes.

"You are right," he said. "I have never loved you; but at least I am perfectly just. Most fathers would have turned you out of doors to earn your own bread. I kept you under my roof, and married you to a man who at least adores you, and can give you everything you desire. It was my duty, and I have never shrunk from duty, even if it were distasteful. But now I feel my obligation is ended. I have explained your position, and my perfect right to do what I please with Knockrea. You must never blame me if in the future anticipations are not justified by results. And now allow me to wish you good-night. Ellingsworth will be wondering at your long absence."

He took her hand in his cold reluctant grasp. He rarely kissed her. He did not do so now. Then he opened the door and watched her cross the hall, and go up the broad staircase.

He came back slowly, and began to pace the room with measured, even steps—deliberate, as most of his actions were.

"I have spoken as plainly as I dare," he said. "She will remember this interview some day."

CHAPTER XIII.

"You tould me to bring the child, sir. Come in Kitty, don't be hangin' back like that. Make your curtsy to the gintleman."

Philip Marsden lifted his head and looked at the two intruders. "I've seen her running wild about the village," he remarked; "but—well you've made a transformation in her appearance, Biddy."

"Beggin' your honor's pardin, I've managed to git some dacint clothes together, and I always kape her clane whin I'm at home. It's whin I'm away, sir, she gits so wild and outrageous-lookin'."

The cold, steely eyes were taking merciless survey of the pretty elf. Her wild shy glance, her changing color, only added to the charm of her appearance.

"Well, Kitty," he said with a sort of effort, "so you want to go to school and leave rags and dirt behind you. Is that it?"

"Yes, sir," she said simply, and speaking with a careful pronounciation of right vowels, that she could assume when she pleased.

"Ah, well, you may change your opinion, you know, when you've had a taste of discipline. You come of a race that never took kindly to it. Have you learnt anything at all yet?"

"I've been to the school in the village, sir, on and off. They don't tache you much."

Mr. Marsden knitted his brows. "If you went to a proper school at once," he said, "I'm afraid you would be rather out of your element. I happen to know two old maiden ladies in England, who take a few girls to educate and bring up, so that they may earn their own livelihood some day. It will be a useful modern education, and when you are sixteen, you ought to be able to do for yourself. However, that is a long look forward. You must make up your mind to be perfectly obedient, and to try and get out of all your rude, rough habits. If not, they will send you back again, and I shall take no further interest in you."

“Ah! shure, sir, she’ll be a good child enough,” said Biddy. “If the ladies you spake of are only pashent wid her for a while, there’ll not be much throuble afterwards.”

Mr. Marsden’s keen eyes were still on the child’s face. Her eyes were roving to and fro, taking in all the beauty and artistic fitness of the room.

“The likeness is wonderful,” he said to himself. “Wonderful! She will serve my purpose admirably.”

Then he turned again to Biddy. “You quite understand,” he said; “once a year she will come over to Ireland, and may stay with you if she wishes. For the rest of the time she must make up her mind to study hard and improve herself. I will give you a sum of money to provide her with clothes and a trunk, of course. Don’t let her set off to England with the proverbial ‘bundle.’ You must get what she requires in Limerick. She will start in a week. I have arranged for some one to take her.”

Biddy wiped her eyes. “’Tis mighty hard partin’ wid her; but shure ’tis for her good, the darlin’, and I’ve always felt the day would come whin——”

A warning look cut short her words. “That is all I have to say then. This day week, remember, she must start. My housekeeper will give you a list of suitable garments for her; and here is a sum that should suffice for all.”

He handed her some notes, which she took with a profound curtsy, and placed carefully in the bosom of her gown. Kitty looked on with more curiosity than gratitude.

This hard, cold-looking man, with his chill smile and ungracious manner, seemed the last sort of person to play benefactor. She was wondering why he took this interest in her; what claim Biddy had on him. However, the bargain was concluded. She had made her parting curtsy, and Biddy was hurrying her down the hall, and to the servants’ quarters, before she found opportunity to ask the question.

Biddy shut her up promptly. “Don’t ye be too curious, child. ’Tis a bad thing intirely, and wasn’t a holy woman in the Good Book itself turned into a pillar o’ salt for that same sin? Shure, Father Reilly told me so his own self, whin I axed him the name o’ his new housekeeper. The gintleman’s goin’ to befriend ye, and the rayson ov it don’t consarn ye a bit. And whisht ye now, and remimber your manners, for the housekeeper here is a gran’ lady intirely, and ’tis quite an honor to be resayved in her apartment,”

Meanwhile, Philip Marsden sat on for long after they had left the library, gazing moodily out of the open windows, the frown on his brow deepening every moment.

At last he rose, and going over to an old-fashioned escritoire in one corner of the room he unlocked it, and took from the drawer a packet of letters. They were tied with a rose-colored ribbon, faded now like the ink with which they were written. Slowly and deliberately he untied the ribbon, and read the letters one by one.

“To think,” he said in a low voice of intense anger, “that the grave holds their secret—that I shall never know! That all my life I am to be haunted by this hateful suspicion. Why don’t I burn them? I shall never learn the truth now. No, they will aid my revenge. They will be the only legacy I shall leave to—Lady Ellingsworth. ‘Lady’ Ellingsworth—how well she has done for herself. How well she has kept her secret. How little she dreams of the Nemesis I have set on her track.”

He tied the letters together with the faded ribbon, and replaced them in the secret drawer.

Then he opened another drawer and took out a large folded parchment. He stood there for long, reading it slowly, the frown on his brow darkening as he turned the crackling pages.

“I must alter it now,” he said. “I will send for old Dillon to-morrow. It is a great scheme; it will avenge and justify and reward all in one. I think I have considered every possibility. I see no chance that could break it down.”

Slowly and carefully he replaced the document, his thin lips relaxing into their old cynical curves as he locked the escritoire again. Then he went in to luncheon, with still the shadow of that smile hovering about his mouth.

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Mrs. Geoghagan, the housekeeper at Knockrea, was an inveterate gossip.

Any one who dropped in on her was expected to regale her with all the news of the place—the births, and deaths, and marriages, and wakes—the christenings and quarrelings of the village.

Talk was as much as necessity to her as her dinner or her attendance at morning church. She came of a family who had suffered from that worst of misfortunes—“seeing better days.” It was at once a lamentation and a boast on her lips,

as the society of the moment conduced to pride, or allowed of reminiscences.

She and the dalin' woman were old friends. She welcomed her, therefore, with the frankness of intimacy, and the curiosity recently set afire by her master's startling information that he intended to provide for Biddy's wild waif.

"Ah, Mrs. Maguire, I was expecting you," she said heartily. "Sit down now, and tell me all about it. 'Tis a wonderful piece of luck for the child. Wonderful indeed! I was fairly taken aback when Mr. Marsden told me yesterday. There—there—but of course the gentry has their little secrets too. Not but what I've often thought you could throw plenty o' light on the history of Kitty there—if you chose to do it—but you're the close one, Biddy Maguire, when it serves your purpose. Ah! a wink's not lost on me; I know what you mean, woman. Kitty child, if ye'll run down to the servants' hall there'll be some bread and jam for you. Ask Mary Flannaghan to give it to you—the red-haired girl. You'll find the way straight enough. It's the other end of that passage beyond the baize doors. Be off with you now."

Kitty obeyed with alacrity. She didn't want to hear the gossip, but she did want the bread and jam.

"And now, Biddy, what's the meaning of it all?" asked Mrs. Geoghagan, when they were alone. "'Twas fairly dazed I was when the master says to me, 'Make out a list of clothing—every sort of garment,' he says, 'such as a young lady would be requiring at school.' He said 'young lady,' Biddy; and then to hear 'twas Kitty herself was to be educated and set up! Well, miracles isn't over, I says to myself. Why, 'twas more than he ever troubled about poor Miss Hermy, that it was. Now, what's the meaning of it all, Biddy?"

"Troth thin, Mary Geoghagan, meself is no wiser than ye are. 'Tis just a fancy he took to the purty child, and maybe he's a bit kinder hearted than we're after supposin'."

"Ah, then, Mrs. Maguire, it's keeping your own secrets ye'd be, is it? What about the night you came here and saw the master in the library? What about the going away to the seaside, eh, Mrs. Maguire? Don't be after trying to throw the dust in my eyes, for though I've come down in the world I have my own proper pride, and know what's due to me."

"God forbid I'd be afther trying to decaive ye, ma'am," said Biddy fervently. "Shure 'tis just out of kindness the masther is doin' it. It's thrue for ye I came here one evening

to see himself, but 'twas on account of rint and the throuble o' that ould blayguard ov a husband o' mine. Faith and that's gospel truth, Mrs. Geoghagan; and says he, "'Tis a shame that purty child should be running wild about the place.' I sez, 'It is, sir,' and that she was allays axin me to have her taught dacintly; and what a love o' larnin' she had, and the quickness ov her, and the memory—oh, grand entirely; and says he, 'I'd not mind doin' ye a kindness, Biddy Maguire; and I'll have the child edicated and taught to earn her own livin';' and shure as I'm a livin' woman that was all that passed betwane us, until he sends word to me to come up this mornin', just as I was tidyin' up the place, and that great lazy *omadhaun* lying on the broad ov his back wid his eyes shut, and divil a sthroke's work in him this week past."

She stopped for want of breath, and looked at Mrs. Geoghagan with eyes of unabashed innocence.

"It's a pretty tale entirely," said that lady. "But as for the truth of it—well, Biddy, I'm thinkin' Father Egan will be putting the penance on you if you go to confession next Sunday."

"Ah, now," said Biddy slyly, "is it yourself tells ivery wuurd ov truth thim times, Mrs. Geoghagan? Why, 'tis turning ov ye inside out, they'd like to be, and knowin' your own affairs and your neighbors' too, and pinnince if ye tell, and pinnince if ye don't tell; and I'm thinkin' the masther wouldn't like his business blabbered to the praste's ears, for he's a mighty particular man, and saycret as the grave if he's a mind to be that same."

"Oh, never mind the priests," said Mrs. Geoghagan. "They're all very well in their way, but we know how much 'tis best to tell them."

"Shure 'tis a quare sort ov affair altogither," said Biddy, "but a mighty throuble off my mind all the same. The child is too purty and too clever for the place ov her."

"There now!" exclaimed Mrs. Geoghagan triumphantly; "wasn't I saying there was a mystery? You've always told us that Kitty's mother was a poor girl who had been deceived, and you had found her dying and taken the child out of pity. Now, answer me this, Biddy Maguire—why should she be too clever and too fine for her place if she came only of poor parents—or peasant folk? Answer me that."

Biddy shook her head. "Faith, ma'am, I couldn't. Maybe it's what Johanna Reardon calls the laws of primogen-

iture—though the manin' o' that the saints can tell better than meself."

"Who was Kitty's mother?" demanded Mrs. Geoghagan.

"Is it her name ye want? Shure, I never axed her—the poor craythur was in 'mortal extremis,' as they say, and couldn't be worried. She'd been trampin' the country, and 'twas on the coast—at a place called Derrynane she was took bad, and faith, 'twas an awful time, and only meself to help her—and all she sez was, 'Take care o' the child, for the love o' heaven—she's no father,' she says—and then she dies. And niver a sign more, nor a scrap ov paper, nor a sign of a weddin' ring—and that's all."

"A poor story enough," said Mrs. Geoghagan; "and mighty mysterious, I must say. How old would you say the child was?"

"Oh, a matter ov eight years or so," said Biddy.

"Eight years?" Mrs. Geoghagan rose from her chair. "Will you be goin' to the kitchen for some dinner now, Mrs. Maguire? Eight years—eight years."

"What ov that?" asked Biddy sharply. "No, thank ye, I won't be stayin' to ate anything to-day; ye're lookin' mighty mysterious, ma'am, all ov a sudden."

"I was trying to think where Mr. Marsden was eight years ago. If ye remember, the house was shut up, and he was away for a long time in England. We all thought——"

"Shure, that's nuthin', here nor there," said Biddy indifferently.

"No, perhaps not. Only I remember he wrote me a letter saying he was coming home on a certain day, and to have the place ready for him. Well, Biddy Maguire, I've kept that letter by me all these years, and never thought more of it. Wait a moment, woman, I'll show ye the envelope. I've got it in my desk here."

She unlocked an old-fashioned desk, and turned over a pile of receipts, documents, letters. Finally she took out a packet of letters, all in the same handwriting—clear, small, precise.

"These are the masther's letters," she said. "I happened to be looking over them the other day, and I noticed this one had a postmark I'd never noticed. Look for yourself, Biddy Maguire. There's the date and the month all correct, and the name of the place where it was posted."

Biddy came forward and took the envelope in her hand. The date was eight years before. The postmark was—Kenmare,

CHAPTER XIV.

KITTY stood before her neat school trunk contemplating its contents with ecstasy.

Such garments seemed altogether too wonderful and marvelous to be her own—and yet they were. The terrier was walking round, sniffing at the box, and looking anxiously up at the absorbed face that had no memory of him now. By the fireplace sat Jim Maguire, smoking his pipe, and holding forth on the rights of property and the wrongs of the working class.

Biddy was bustling about trying to keep up her spirits by a show of activity, and relieving her mind by an occasional snap at her husband, whom she addressed by such endearments as: “Ye sour, bloodthirsty ould Turk; ye unbelavin’, unthankful haythin. If ye’re clever wid your tongue, it’s more than ye are wid your hands. If it weren’t for me, where’d ye be at this prisint minnit?”

“I don’t hould wid settin’ up the child in this fashion,” observed Jim in an interval of silence, “and I don’t understand the rights ov it. Shure, ’tis meself ’ud have made a better use ov the money any day.”

“You!” exclaimed Biddy with scorn. “’Tis in the public house it ’ud go—iviry penny ov it! Why don’t ye git to work? Shure, the bit ov land is just run over wid weeds, and ye’re too lazy to raise a finger to it.”

“I come of a family that despise wurk,” said Jim loftily. “Shure, don’t I remimber when we had our jaunтин’ car, and our flitches o’ bacon, and tay and potheen, like the best in the land? But the hand ov oppression has robbed us of all. Work, is it, and for the robber and tyrant? Not meself, Biddy woman!”

“Oh! wisha, goodness help me!” exclaimed his wife. “I’m well punished for the pride ov me. Shure, me own family, if it comes to that, could have baten yours in descint any day, Jim Maguire. And here I’m chained to an idle vagabond who’s niver done a dacint day’s work, and expects his wife to kape him in luxuries. Ah! ’tis a sorry

bargain I made, and not a minute's paice or aise whin ye're in the place at all—at all!"

Jim rose with dignity. "I know where I am welcome," he said, "and where a dhrop o' whisky isn't begrudged me by thim as knows what I ought to be if I had my rights. Shure, 'tis meself has aten the bitter bread o' heart-sickness and misery, and the wife ov me bosom only mocks me! Good-night, Kitty agra. Slape well, and be ready for the mornin'. 'Tis a sore world for tinder hearts, as maybe you'll find, child."

He put on his battered old hat, and went out, leaving the two in undisturbed possession of the kitchen. Biddy finished the packing in silence, dropping a tear now and then on the neat garments. Her heart was sore and heavy, and she almost repented of the resolution that had led to this sudden alteration in their lives.

"If I thought ye'd not forget me, child, or despise me," she said at last, turning to look at the pretty figure in its neat serge gown, and well-shod feet—the traveling dress of the morrow.

"Oh, I won't forget you!" exclaimed Kitty. "I wish you wouldn't cry so, Biddy. After all, a year's not so long, and then I'll be back again. I wonder what sort of place England is. I wish you knew. Will the people be like Mr. Marsden at all?"

Biddy shook her head. "I couldn't say, darlin'. I've niver been out ov Ireland meself, and though I've seen English people often enough, they were so mighty proud and stiff, I couldn't make thim out at all."

The child looked thoughtful. The lid of the trunk was shut down now, and Biddy turned the key in the lock. Then she sat herself down on the old settle, and beckoned the child to come over to her.

A mood of unusual softness prompted Kitty to obey.

The kindly arms—her only shelter since infancy—closed her round. She leant her pretty dusky head against the old woman's shoulder, suffering Biddy to croon over her to her heart's content. Suddenly a soft knock came to the door. A head, enveloped in a dull red shawl, looked in.

"*Go mance Dia in sho* (God save all here). How's yourself, Biddy Maguire? How's ivery one ov ye? 'Tis the poor Red Hen, and that fataygued as she's almost ready to drop."

"Oh, come in, Molly," cried Biddy, not too eagerly—the visitor was singularly unwelcome. "Sit down and rest yourself. Mind the box there—it's gettin' a bit dark."

The little woman sidled in, and took a stool beside the dull turf embers.

"Shure 'tis a great piece ov news to me—that the child's goin' away," she said. "'Twas Johanna Reardon was afther tellin' me—I couldn't belave me two ears—but she swore 'twas throe—and I just thought I'd ax ye, and give her my blessin' too. But how's it all come about, Biddy woman? What's the gintleman interesting himself for about Kitty the Rag at all?"

"Shure ye mustn't be afther callin' her that any more," said Biddy hastily. "'Tis Kitty Maguire she's to be—and that's the name she's goin' into the grand new life with, and good luck may it bring her—that's what I sez."

"And meself sez the same. But shure, Biddy, what's the manin' ov it? That's what ivery one is asking. Why should the gintleman at Knockrea——"

"Who tould you 'twas Mr. Marsden?" asked Biddy sharply. "Shure 'tis the crows carry the gossip here, for niver a thing but 'tis known, however saycret one is."

"I'll not be lettin' out how I heard it," said the little woman. "It was a quare way eno', but none the less truth in it."

"Well, throe or not, it's not for me to be talking of rayson or no rayson," said Biddy. "The child's goin' to be edicated, and that's all."

"Av course I cud say somethin'," said the Red Hen, looking very wise; "but, shure, I can kape the silent tongue in my head av I choose. And doubtless ye know best, Biddy Maguire, what to do for the child, though settin' ov her up and placin' her above her natural station isn't any way ov earnin' her gratitude, or any one else's for that matther."

"Ah, she'll do; don't be botherin' your head about her," said Biddy petulantly. "Will ye have a cup of tay, Molly, and a griddle cake? ye're mighty welcome to both."

"Well, thank ye kindly, Biddy, I don't mind if I do; 'tis yourself is the fortunate woman, and has the comforts about ye."

Biddy brought out a cup and the cakes, and set them before her guest. Kitty sat by the fire in sullen silence. She hated the Red Hen, and never concealed her animosity.

"And so the lady's gone back agin," said the old woman presently, as she drank her tea. "Ah, the fine, beautiful craythur she's grown, and rememberin' us all the same as if 'twas yesterday. Ah, 'twas sorry I was to see the mark on her, the mark ov sorrow, Biddy. There's throuble in store for her; black throuble and sorrowful days."

"Whisht ye," said Biddy quickly. "Don't be afther talkin' like that. How can ye tell?"

"Tell, is it? Maybe I know more than you think. Maybe I can give a guess at your saycrets too, Biddy Maguire. Ah, there's eyes and ears about that ye don't know of."

Kitty rose suddenly and approached, her face aglow with interest. "Is it about me ye're meaning?" she said. "Is it saycrets o' mine? Tell me, Molly, do. Do ye know who I am at all? Perhaps my mother was a lady after all; Biddy won't say. I'm tired of asking."

The small ferret eyes of the Red Hen peered curiously into the child's intent face. "A lady, avic? Maybe you're not so far wrong. In any case your father was a gintleman."

Biddy started as if she had been shot.

"Ah now, hush, woman! What are ye sayin' at all? Putting idays in the child's head."

"Be quiet, Biddy; I will hear. A gintleman, ye said. Do you know his name?"

"Well, he was too sly-goin' to let out the rale name ov him. 'Twould have bin a shame and a show to the whole place besides. But shure, alannah, you're not far to look. Kape your eyes open, and when ye're a bit oulder and wiser-like, shure, you've only to remimber who 'twas took such a mighty interest in ye."

"For shame, Molly," interposed Biddy angrily. "'Tis all lies ye're tellin'; not a word o' truth in it at all, at all!"

Kitty looked from one to the other, her face flushed and eager, her bright restless eyes afire with longing. "I shall find out for meself," she said at last. "I tell ye both straight, 'tisn't for nothin' I'm bein' made a lady of."

"Shure 'tis the blood spakin' out," exclaimed the Red Hen, rising and drawing her shawl about her small spare frame. "And look at the face, and the two eyes ov her. Ah! glory be to God, but thim as knows hasn't far to look. Well good-

night to ye, and good luck, Kitty, agra ; maybe whin ye come back things will have changed a bit. You're lookin' overcome, Biddy Maguire. 'Tis sorry I am to have disturbed ye. There's a heaviness upon me own self too. Ah, indade, 'tis a sorrowful world for some av us."

She went out leaving Biddy irate and indignant, and Kitty a thousandfold more curious than ever.

But she could get nothing more from Biddy save rebukes and lamentations, and finally took herself off to bed in a fit of the sulks, leaving the poor dalin' woman to her solitary reflections by the dying fire.

"The Lord sind me comfort," she moaned, "I'm dazed wid terrors, and the sorrow ov it all. Ah, musha ! why did I iver lend meself to sich a pace ov work ? And she suspects nothing. Shure, I could see that, and me all ov a trimble ivery time she passed me. Ah ! the saints presarve us, but me heart misgives me intirely."

She shuddered and drew near the hearth, and sat gazing into the dull embers, while great hot tears gathered in her eyes and rolled down her rough face.

Her thoughts flew back to a strange scene—a promise wrung from compassion—as well as bribed by heavy stress of poverty—a secret at first light and insignificant, now growing heavier and darker as time passed on. How strange and tortuous the path looked ; how impossible it was to follow its windings, or guess at its goal.

"And I love her so, as if 'twas me own flesh and blood she was," she moaned. "Ah, indade, 'tis the sorrowful wurrl, and Father Dillon gone too, and not a sowl I dare spake to. And me boy, the pride ov me heart, far over the says, or under thim. Shure, 'tis the heavy punishment I've had to bear for my pride in him ; and sometimes I fear I'll niver agin be welcomin' him back to the ould hearth—niver agin, Eugene machree, niver agin."

Darker and darker grew the night. The splash of rain fell on the thatched roof. A moaning wind crept softly round the house, sighing like an uneasy ghost. And still she sat on in the old rickety chair, glancing back through the shadowy years into the midst of past events.

And through all she felt the dull pain of a truth her heart refused to acknowledge, pressing stubbornly upon her brooding fancies.

Dearly as she loved this waif, bravely as she had struggled

for her, no answering love had ever been really her reward. Selfish, passionate, heedless as is all youth, this child, born of youth's selfish headstrong passion, was even more selfish, more callous, than childhood often seems.

Her life was self-centred and egotistic. This desire for a different station, another position, was it only natural ambition or the result of inherited pride?

The wind, carrying on careless wings the blossom of the orchard, the seed of the garden, is not more heedless of results than the fierce breath of passing passion, whose whole world of desire embraces but the immediate moment, and foresees no results, and heeds no consequences.

CHAPTER XV.

It is not possible to pass from idle days of vagabondage to social restrictions and the obligations of civilized life without strife and heart-burning and rebellion.

Kitty Maguire, as she was now called, emerged from the birth-throes of discipline changed—tutored as to dress, manner, and way of speaking, but still untamed at heart. The first year of her school life had done wonders for her outward appearance. She was no longer rough, wild, unkempt. Her massive curls had the gloss and sheen of the wood-berry, her dress was scrupulously neat and tastefully simple. Her voice knew the charm of modulation—though anger or impatience still awoke a wild note of defiance, and that touch of the “brogue” the Irish voice never quite loses.

The two maiden ladies to whose care she had been entrusted had found her a somewhat onerous charge. The other girls, three in number, had at first made a pet or a butt of her alternately ; but a few outbursts of Kitty’s temper and one or two specimens of Kitty’s tongue had soon convinced them she was best left unmolested.

The imitative faculty was strong enough in the child to enable her to copy their manners and appearance very accurately, and that curious process of “levelling” which the young can alone bestow upon the young was no bad form of discipline for one so self-willed and headstrong.

The year had drifted by, and the summer vacation was to be spent in Ireland. A letter from Biddy had informed her of the arrangements for her journey, and that she would herself meet her at Kingstown. An escort had been found to Holyhead, when she was to be put in charge of the stewardess.

The night was so fine and warm that many of the passengers remained on deck, and the dreaded Channel was like a mill pond. Kitty chose to do the same. Her composure and self-assertiveness made most people take her to be much older than she was. She found herself a comfortable corner, and seated herself on the rug with which she had been provided. Her quick roving eyes took note of the figures passing to and fro in the clear moonlight. Among them she noted two priests—one

young with a pale ascetic-looking face, the other older and more robust-looking, with keen blue eyes and a good-humored smile.

They had passed her several times. At last the elder man went downstairs, but the younger still kept up his monotonous walk, pausing now and then to look over the steamer's side or up at the clear blue of the star-studded sky. Some restless movement of the little bundle huddled up in the corner at last attracted him. He looked down and saw the glowing eyes and brilliant face of Kitty.

For a moment he stood quite still, watching her. Then he came a step or two nearer.

"Are you all alone, my child?" he said.

His voice had the faint accent and the melancholy sweetness associated in her mind with the country to which she was going. She answered him without that affectation of the English tongue she had done her best to adopt.

"Yes, your reverence."

"Ah!" he said, "so you are Irish, little one?"

His voice was tremulous and broken as if by some agitating memory.

"I have been away," he went on, "so many—many years. It does my heart good to hear the old tongue again. Tell me your name and where you live."

"Kitty Maguire's my name," said the child, "and I am going back to Kerry. I've been to school in England. These are my holidays."

He seemed to start slightly. "Maguire?" he said, "are you from Kerry? Do your parents live there?"

"No," she said brusquely. "They're dead. I live with Biddy and her husband. Do you know Kerry? We live in a village near Knockrea."

"I—I have heard of it," he said evasively. "Is Biddy Maguire any relation to you then?"

The child looked amazed. "I don't know the rights of it," she said shortly. "I've lived with her ever since I can remember. But it's Mr. Marsden of Knockrea who is paying for my schooling."

The young man said nothing. His face looked strangely white under the moonrays—his eyes seemed searching hers in an eager piercing scrutiny that almost frightened her.

"Why do you look at me so?" she asked. "Do you know me?"

"No," he said abruptly. "Only you remind me of some one I used to know—long, long ago."

Kitty was silent for a moment. Then she said abruptly: "Do you like being a priest? You're very young, aren't you?"

"I have only been lately ordained," he said. "I am going to join an order in Limerick."

"I should think it was horrid," said the child. "Isn't it very hard to be always good?"

"Hard?"—he bit his lip—"of course it is hard," he said, "and no one is good always, child. The flesh and the spirit are ever at warfare. As for liking the office—that is not the way to regard it. God calls us, we must obey. In fulfilling His will and doing His work we find our highest happiness."

"Yes," she said with an elfish smile, "that is what they all say. All the same, you don't look happy, any of you."

"There is a happiness in doing one's duty," he said rebukingly. "Have you never learned that yet, Kitty?"

"No," she said. "I hate being good; and doing one's duty seems only to mean doing everything you don't want to do, and that other people make you."

He looked at the mutinous face somewhat sadly. "Have you had no religious instruction yet?" he asked.

"Plenty. More than I want, or can understand. I was a Catholic in Ireland, and I'm a Protestant in England, and not a bit better do I feel for either."

"Hush, hush!" he said. "That is very wrong. You should not forsake the true faith. In it alone are rest and peace, and promise of eternal life."

"I should not mind living for ever if I could live in this world," was the audacious answer. "But up there—so far away, where one would always have to be good—Oh! I hope it won't be for ever."

"Would you rather live in eternal torment?" asked the young priest sternly. "It seems to me you are half a heretic already."

The child folded her hands tightly round her knees, and fixed her eager gaze upon his face.

"Tell me this," she said. "Why does one sort of Church say one thing and one another? Why does a priest teach one way to heaven, and a clergyman, as they call him, another? Who is to know who is right, and why should we be punished if we believe the wrong one?"

"There is only one right," he answered. "Those who have the care of you should have instructed you better. Who is the parish priest at Knockrea?"

"Father Egan," she said, "but I hated him. He was cruel, and he neglected the poor, and was for ever makin' up to the gentry, and he never stood up for the rights of the people—so Jim said. He never troubled about us, or what we learnt at the schools, and as for the chapel, why no one can understand what they say there at all!"

The young priest looked at her regretfully. "I wish I had the teaching of you," he said. "Not that I know much myself yet, with all the study. But I feel so sure—so sure that we are right—and the hope is so blest, the reward so great, and the world so evil, so full of temptation, sin, vileness."

He drew a long breath. His eyes were on the shining heavens. He seemed to forget he was speaking only to a child. He had in him the faith and strength of purpose of which martyrs are made. The old, ill-fated faith of Rome was to him the embodiment of all things noble and divine. Sin—long repented of—but still lying like a festering sore upon memory—had driven him to the Church. The bloody scourge, the daily penance, were things well known to Father Considine. To purify the soul he had spared no torture or self-sacrifice to the body. His zeal was almost too fervent, and, combined with his talents and proficiency, promised him a ripe heritage of earthly as well as heavenly rewards in time to come. He was barely twenty-six, and already his order had begun to speak of him with reverence and wonder.

As he stood there now in the summer starlight—his face illumined with the fervor of his thoughts—the child felt a sudden sense of awe and wonder steal over her.

"I should like you to teach me," she said. "You are very different from Father Egan, or Mr. Kilmayne."

His earnest eyes fell on her again. He was searching his mind for some word—some counsel that would bear fruit in the future—that, falling on this strange soil, might yet blossom into fruit of promise.

"Child," he said at last, "let me tell you a story. Perhaps we have met to-night for a purpose. God's ways are strange, and man may not question them. Enough for us that He has deigned to reveal the mysteries of faith through His Church. You are too young to understand, you are not too young to accept. The heart of man is deceitful; it is full of

wickedness. I tell you so, as others must have told you. For hundreds of years the evil in us has had to fight with the good revealed to us. This world is only a battle ground, and you speak of living in it for ever! For ever! The thought is hideous. But you speak as a child only can speak, knowing nothing of life, of sorrow, of suffering."

He paused and drew his hand across his brow, damp with the dew of earnestness. "I wish I could make you understand," he said. "Listen. There was once a child like yourself—careless, self-satisfied, headstrong. To him life said, as it says to you: 'Enjoy—be happy.' He also would have wished the life of this world might last for ever—it was his paradise. Then, suddenly, without warning, there came to him a subtle temptation. It looked so beautiful, this sin, that he would not call it sin: he would not try to resist it, and he fell. Oh! the horror, the shame, the agony of the fall—who can tell but his own soul and the blessed Christ who saw its sufferings? And then came a dark and terrible time—no peace, no help anywhere. And then, at last, out of the darkness a voice—out of the terrors a helping hand—and bruised and broken, and heart-sore and penitent, he threw himself at the foot of the Cross, and help came to him, and peace and hope of pardon; and he lives on to thank God every hour of life that he was saved by His blessed mercy."

The child's eyes had never left his face. The eloquence and passion of his words had irradiated it with a lofty beauty beyond its natural charm of expression, or the perfectly cut features. As a rule the priests she had known were old men, with grizzled hair, flabby cheeks, wrinkled brows. This young enthusiast, with his melancholy eyes and nervous, mobile lips, was more than ever attractive by force of contrast.

She drew a deep breath. "Was the boy yourself?" she asked.

He started, and crossed himself hastily. "No matter," he said. "I have told you as a warning. Some day, when you are older and have learnt the power of beauty, and the charm of sex, perhaps you will also learn the meaning of temptation. I would you might remember my words. No joy, no promised happiness, is ever worth a sin to gain it. It withers at your touch; it lies flowerless and dead upon your lips; it leaves a haunting remorse. The gifts of earth are not worth the barter of the soul's peace, for they perish as the body perishes; but the soul lives on for ever, and ever, and ever!"

His lips quivered. He bent his head as if in prayer. She watched him fascinated and awe-struck. The words were not intelligible yet. The freaks and petulance, and tempers and rebellion of childhood seemed to her too natural to deserve so harsh a name as sin. But the tone and look of the speaker made a deep impression on her mind.

As he turned abruptly away, she called to him almost entreatingly.

"Oh, I am sure I am wicked," she said. "I can't help it. I seem as if I must be. Biddy was so good to me, and I never did anything but plague her. I wanted to be a lady and grand, and not poor and hard-working like herself, and I made her get the money to send me away. Is all this wrong? Ought I to live with her and try to please her, because she was good to me when I had no one in the world to take care of me?"

He stopped, and stood looking down at the earnest face, flushed and eager, and curiously appealing in this moment of awakened feeling. "Tell me your history," he said; "then I will tell you your duty."

She stammered out a confused account of that hapless infancy, in which what she had heard and what she believed were strangely mingled.

The priest's face grew pale to the lips as he listened.

"You say Mr. Marsden of Knockrea has done all this for you?" he asked faintly.

"Yes, sir. Biddy went to him straight one evening when I'd been plaguing her to have me sent to a proper school, and he promised he'd give her the money; and so he did. And he sent for me and told me I was to be a good girl, and try my best to learn and fit myself for a better position, and that's what I mean to do. Indeed, your reverence, I couldn't content myself with a cabin, and the hard life, and Jim's drunken ways."

"Jim!" he said abruptly. "Jim Maguire?"

"Yes, your reverence. Do you know him?"

He was silent. His face had suddenly grown set and cold. That mask to all feeling which priesthood and monkhood so soon teach, seemed to alter it to rigid impassivity.

"The ways of God are strange," he said hoarsely. "Who shall fathom their meaning? I—I once knew such a man. He was not a good character—and his wife had much to put up with. She was a hard-working, and industrious creature, and good and loving too."

"Ah, that's just like Biddy," said the child. "She was always kind-hearted, and never a cross word to me, and that patient with Jim, even though she did lash out a bit with her tongue now and then. Did you really ever know her? She'll be coming to meet me when we get to Kenmare. Maybe you'll like to speak to her."

He made a hurried gesture. "No, child—no—it—it must be a mistake. The name is common enough. What were we talking of?—your history. Yes, your duty is to the woman who has befriended and cared for you. No ambition of your own should interfere with it. Young as you are, you are called upon to decide. Your whole future may depend on it."

"Then if—if after the eight years' schooling Mr. Marsden has promised—Biddy wants me back——"

"It will be your duty to go back."

"Oh, I can't—I can't," cried Kitty passionately. "It would be hateful. I don't want to be poor. I feel I ought to be something better. I told you it was *in* me—like a hunger that won't be satisfied."

"The very fact of its seeming so hard, so impossible, is the surest sign that it is duty," answered the young priest. "The right path is always strewn with thorns—it is the evil one that lies turf-covered and rose-bordered before our longing eyes."

She was silent for a moment. The splash of the paddle wheels—the sound of the sea—fell on her ears with strange distinctness. All her life henceforth that sound would be associated with this moment—and this man.

"I couldn't do it," she said. "I love Biddy—but I hate that life. I want to——"

He made a sudden gesture.

"I know that want," he said: "that restless craving for something better, easier, sensuous, and self-satisfying. You have the woman soul. Pray heaven it may not lead you into error, as it has led so many."

He turned away then, leaving her sitting on her pile of rugs—her moody eyes gazing straight ahead at the shining waters, her heart aflame with longing, and wonder, and discontent.

"I can't do it," she muttered. "I'd never be happy. He's only a priest—what does he know? I've set my heart on being a lady, and I mean to be one."

CHAPTER XVI.

BIDDY greeted the child with mingled exclamations of rapture and wonderment. She was so grown, so altered, so beautiful !

As she stood clasping her in her arms, pouring forth ejaculations and tears alternately, the two priests passed them. The younger one had drawn his felt hat low down over his brow. His coat touched her. She did not observe him.

Human instinct is after all a dulled and half-dim sense which the brute creation puts to shame. A prayer is granted—and lo ! we know it not, because the answer comes in some unexpected way, or at some inopportune moment.

As the long weary journey went on, Kitty grew sullen and discontented. Everything grated on her ; the uncomfortable seats, the dirty, ill-dressed people, the coarse brogue, the unceasing clatter of tongues, and the perpetual gossip about other people's affairs.

The stifling heat of the July day was giving way to the coolness of eventide—the sun was setting behind the mountains,—the fields were ripening to harvest. Lovely peeps of valley and river and wood flashed by as the coach sped on, but the discontent in the child's soul never lessened. She brought no gladness of heart back to her native land—only dark and sordid memories.

Biddy's cabin, and her old miserable sleeping loft, came back to her vision, and when they reached the terminus she relapsed into sullen silence, and not even the bargaining for an outside car roused her.

Biddy looked at her with sorrow, and with apprehension. So short a time—so great a change. With all her pride and gladness her heart grew heavy, and the tender words ceased to flow from her lips, and she sat in melancholy grandeur beside the child for whom she had made so many sacrifices.

The village was all astir with curiosity at Kitty's return. Cries of welcome greeted them as the car drew up at the well-known cottage. Jim—unshaven, tattered, as of old—was again leaning over the railings ; his pipe in his mouth ; his at-

titude and appearance still a consistent protest against the oppressor.

Within the little kitchen all was bright and cheerful. The table was spread with good things; the kettle sang above the blazing sticks. Window and door were open to the twilight glow. Everything was clean and neat as hands could make it.

Yet to Kitty's eyes, accustomed to well-furnished rooms, large and airy accommodation, a well-appointed table, well-served meals—all these homely preparations looked common and poverty-stricken.

She did not say so; but her face expressed no pleasure, and her eyes never lost their sullen glow of discontent.

Yet she was hungry and tired enough to enjoy the herrings and potatoes, the tea and griddle cakes which Biddy had provided, and enlivened the meal by her accounts of England and school life, and the difference of speech and manners between the two countries.

Biddy listened to her as to an oracle.

It seemed wonderful to her simple soul that the wild, untutored, ignorant waif of a year ago could have changed into this disciplined, correctly-speaking girl—whose very way of eating and drinking was a protest against her surroundings.

"Shure 'twas in the blood—any one could see that now," she said to herself, half-resentful and half-proud of a superiority she could not approach, and that blended past memories with present pain.

There was something bold—resolute—unscrupulous about the child. One felt instinctively that she had set herself an object in life, and that she meant to accomplish it without regard to feelings she might wound—or obstacles she might encounter.

Intelligence sometimes arms itself instinctively against unforeseen dangers, and Kitty's mental attitude at present was that of uplifted hand and clenched fists.

"Am I to go and see Mr. Marsden, Biddy?" she asked as she finished her tea.

"Yes, darlin', ye are, but not till to-morrow evening. Shure, 'tis himself will be surprised when he sets eyes on ye—so grown—and the manners and the larnin' ov ye."

Kitty's scarlet underlip grew scornful. "I wish you could see the other girls," she said. "You wouldn't think much of me beside Una Harrison—or Mabel Deane,"

“Troth, darlin’, I’m not botherin’ me head about thim at all. It’s me own gurl is enough for me.”

Biddy’s fond eyes grew dim once more. She rose and wiped a tear away with her apron as she bustled to and fro—putting away the fragments of the meal, and washing up the cups and plates in an old tin bowl.

Jim sauntered out, pipe in hand, and Kitty followed him, and stood bareheaded by the rickety wooden gate, looking down the familiar street.

She thought of the night little more than a year ago, when she had stood by that same gate and gazed down that same street at the carriage bearing the proud, beautiful woman to Knockrea House.

How that sight had filled her young soul with envy and discontent! How much had happened since!

It seemed strange to look back, and handle, as it were, the first tiny wedge that was to open the close-barred door of the future.

This year had but heightened her ambitions, and confirmed her resolves. Another and yet another must pass and bear her onward on their purposeful wings higher and further from here—this spot that had grown so hateful, that seemed to hold for her only the humiliating picture of Kitty the Rag.

.

This same year had added harder lines to Philip Marsden’s face, a touch or two of grey to his hair, an additional crow’s foot about his eyes, in which a sombre purpose ever brooded.

He sat at his solitary dinner-table, the windows open to the warm July night. He was absorbed in thought, and the frown on his brow seemed to denote the subject was not pleasant.

Suddenly a noise at the window made him look up. Standing there, and gazing at him unabashed and undismayed, was the child Kitty. For a moment he did not recognize her. She had grown—she was neatly and simply dressed. Face, figure, expression, were all altered from what he had known a year ago.

The two looked at each other silently. Then he half rose from his chair.

“Why, what brings you here?” he asked. “I said to-morrow, did I not?”

“Yes,” she answered, “but I wanted to see you to-night.”

"Oh, come in then," he said readily. "Let me see what discipline has done for you."

She entered and walked up to the table. His eyes noted the grace and ease of her movements, the beauty of the flower-like face, the wonderful change that this one year had wrought in her.

"There is a lurking devil in those eyes," he said to himself. "She will do. I am sure of that."

Aloud, he bade her bring a chair to the table, and take any of the fruits that pleased her from the Crown Derby dessert dishes. Then he poured her out a glass of wine, and leant back watching her more intently than ever.

She meanwhile helped herself to a peach, and began to peel it in quite orthodox fashion. He noted how white her hands had become, and how excellent was their shape.

"And now may I ask why you have come here to-night?" he said at last. "I can hardly suppose you were so very anxious to see me as your visit proclaims."

"I thought I would like to tell you about all I've been doing," she said. "It was very hard work, and I didn't like it; and I didn't like England or the people. But I'm getting used to them now, and I've learnt a lot."

"Were you glad to come home?" he asked.

"No—at least I was glad to see Biddy; but I don't like living in that little hole of a cottage, and Jim is so dirty, and everything is so common."

"Ah!" he said, "you've learnt your lesson quickly. The first thing civilization teaches us is discontent with all that has gone before. It makes us ashamed of Nature, and then offers us aprons of fig leaves!"

She glanced at him, and then at the beautiful room. "I wish," she said, "you would let me stay here."

He put down his glass and stared at her.

"That is rather a cool request," he said. "What has become of your affection for Biddy?"

"Oh! that has nothing to do with it," she said. "I love her as much as ever, but I don't like living there now. Why, we haven't knives and forks enough, and no tablecloth. Oh! it's hateful. I never thought it was so bad till I came back to it."

Philip Marsden leant back in his chair and laughed. "Ambition, caprice, vanity," he said slowly. "How speedily these virtues can be grafted on the stem of selfishness. The

fastidiousness that claims table napery as a right may degenerate into the recklessness that sells itself for a coronet. There is something delightfully uncertain in the feminine character. It is like a brand that ignites tragedies—a match thrown haphazard—to expire or inflame.”

The child looked at him—her sombre eyes dark with wonder. She did not half comprehend his meaning, but she wanted a direct answer to her request.

“May I come here?” she repeated; then added, as if urging a reason for so strange a demand, “I’ve heard people say you’re my father, you know.”

“What!” he cried, starting up in his chair, his face ablaze, and the veins in his forehead standing out like whipcord.

She looked at him without any sort of fear.

“Yes, it’s quite true—they say it. Of course, I don’t know. But why did you trouble your head about me if I wasn’t something more than the other children of the village?”

The color gradually left his face.

“So that is what you’ve heard—that is what you think!” he exclaimed. “Did Biddy tell you this—this lie?”

“Is it a lie?” she asked coolly. “Oh, no. Biddy never said so. It was the neighbors—but maybe it’s only jealous they are.”

His eyes were on his plate. He was following out a train of thought in his own mind.

The motives of an action often come back to us as a surprise when clad in the garb our friends and neighbors choose to fit them with. As his indignation cooled he began to ask himself whether this attributed motive was not a better cloak for his designs than his own. At all events the subject would bear thinking out.

He looked up at the child at last, and gave way to a burst of caustic laughter. “Well, Kitty,” he said, “if your friends are bent on inventing a relationship between us, they will do it whatever we say. Evidently your instincts are all against your present position in life. As you have done so much credit, in so short a time, to my charity, it would be hard to send you back to the old, uncongenial surroundings. Go home now, and tell Biddy you are to spend your holidays here, but that she is welcome to as much of your society as you choose to give her.”

The child sprang to her feet, her face radiant with delight.

“Oh, do you really mean it? How kind of you! I’ll promise to behave myself.”

She glanced around at the hundred and one things of beauty in the beautiful room. She clasped her hands in ecstasy.

“Shure, ’tis just like a fairy tale!” she exclaimed, going back to the old expressions with the natural impulse that had not yet been killed out in the forcing house of culture.

Philip Marsden laughed again. Even fairy tales may have unpleasant endings, he remembered.

CHAPTER XVII.

THERE is nothing at once so innocent and so cruel as the selfishness of childhood. It cannot understand the sacrifices made for it; it cannot gauge the depth of love lavished upon it. Daily and hourly the little careless hand stabs the heart that worships it; the whims and caprices and fickleness of a child's changeful affections are so many thorns scattered before the faithful feet that pursue its careless steps.

Heart-smitten by its baffling inconsistencies, we watch the character develop—its moods and tempers, like vagrant airs blown by unknown winds over a garden—wooing spices and scents to scatter them broadcast over wood and mead, over those who desire them not, as over those who crave their fragrance.

Even its love is but a gusty tenderness, passing as quickly as it comes.

If the poor Dalin' Woman could have expressed her own feelings, they would have flowed forth in some such words as these, the night that Kitty returned in triumph to tell her she would spend her holidays at Knockrea House.

At first she was too astounded to speak at all. The pain at her heart held her numbed and silent, and then, when natural reproach broke forth, she felt that it was like speaking an unknown language.

Kitty did not understand her own cruelty. She could see nothing ungrateful in her desertion. She was quite incapable of understanding the longings and desires of this past year, even as she could not comprehend the sense of loneliness and despair which her desertion must inflict on Biddy.

Every little preparation for her comfort—all the pride and thoughtfulness that had been lavished on the humble home made ready for her—were alike ignored by one whose eyes were dazzled by the splendors of the great house, and whose childish soul loathed the humble cottage that had been her only shelter until a year ago.

She was almost angry because Biddy was not as excited and pleased as herself. With childhood's cruel candor she told

her that she could not have lived a month in the cottage—with its close smells, its earthen floor, and its poor sticks of furniture—and Biddy listened with an aching heart, and eyes in which the hot smart of tears was bravely checked.

All the same, it seemed to her that she had tasted the very bitterness of death in that moment—that a grave of division yawned between her and the child whom she had nursed and nurtured and cared for, in all her years of helplessness.

Then pride came to her aid and helped her to hide the wound inflicted so heedlessly.

“I didn’t think that ye’d so soon larn your lesson, Kitty agra,” she-said. “I didn’t think that ye’d so soon larn to be a lady—as ye call it. But if Mr. Marsden wishes for your company it’s not for the likes o’ me to be interferin’. It’s a poor sort o’ holiday that I’ll be havin’, darlin’; but ye’re wise to go where ye’ll be happiest. Ye’re not the first to forsake a poor home for a fine house, and think ye’re gettin’ the best o’ the bargain.”

Kitty was silent. Something in the voice struck even to her selfish little heart, and smote her with momentary self-reproach at her desertion. But the love and adoration Biddy had so long lavished upon her had served in a great measure to foster her natural vanity and wilfulness. Besides, this one year had so opened her eyes!

She had been taught the manners of a lady. She had been well fed, well dressed, and waited on. She had heard other children’s views and opinions of social life and advantages. Above all she had learnt to despise poverty.

Where she got her pride and aptness from was hard to say. But they were inherited possessions, and she would have to suffer for them as the years rolled on.

And unfortunately for her it was not the right sort of pride—not the pride that knows neither envy nor ambition; that sees in poverty no shame, and in work no hardship. At one stride her desires had leapt the barrier that separated poverty from wealth, and from coveting the position she had envied, had sprung the determination to win one like it.

She sat by Biddy’s side while the night drew on and the stars shone over the quiet village street. She poured out to the faithful ears of her first protector all her desires and ambitions, and once again tried to win from her the truth of her own history.

But Biddy’s lips were sealed, and she asked in vain.

Most early youth is happy, because the present is sufficient for it. But Kitty dwelt ever on the future. To her it was an empire that she might possibly inherit—a land of glorious possibilities. For sake of it she allowed herself to despise her obscure and safe position—the faithful love that had counted no cost in her service. She forgot, too, that she was a motherless, nameless outcast, fed and clothed and protected by a supercilious charity—the whim of a chance caprice.

She preferred to think she had a claim upon the protection, a right to the caprice. Her mind was full of irrepressible aspirations—intense longings, cravings that are as poison to any woman's soul which once they enter.

As there are dreams that lift the soul above all mean and sordid things of earth, so there are others that are merely the highway to sin. In some dim fashion Biddy knew this, and on her spirit fell the weight of a bitter foreboding.

That first parting had been hard to bear, but the bitterness of this new separation lay in her own consciousness of the change it foretold. To the child it meant only beatitude—to her it meant the pain of desertion and the sense of a careless ingratitude. That sense of “benefits forgot,” of love lavished in vain, that is at once the sharpest and cruellest heritage of earthly love, touched her for the first time in her life, as she listened to the child's ceaseless chatter, and asked herself how it was all to end.

For once sleep refused her the boon of forgetfulness. For once she lay awake longing for, yet dreading the daylight. For once she felt the secret she had carried so long was a burden hateful and intolerable. But when the day did break, and the old cares and the old duties demanded her attention, she once more masked herself in resigned patience, and stoically drove back her tears, and stifled her regrets.

The child departed full of glee and satisfaction, giving no backward glance to the home that had so long been her shelter, or the patient figure shading its eyes from the sunlight as it stood in the doorway.

She nodded carelessly to the children who spoke to her—or the women who came out with eager questions and that insatiable curiosity of the Irish to know the why and wherefore of their neighbors' doings. But they learnt little from Kitty. That little, however, was enough to set gossip going afresh, and afford fresh reasons for the mysterious interest taken in the child by one so negligent and indifferent as Philip Marsden.

Meantime Kitty arrived at the house, and was ushered upstairs to the room prepared for her, and informed that Mr. Marsden would be in to luncheon at two o'clock and would expect her then in the dining-room.

It was only twelve now, so she had two hours to get through before the ordeal.

She amused herself by an examination of her bedroom. It was a fair-sized, plainly furnished room. A bookshelf containing fairy tales and Maria Edgeworth's stories for the young was hung near the window, and a writing-table furnished with ink and writing-paper stood beneath. She wondered if she would be expected to do lessons; and then satisfied with her discoveries she went downstairs, and peeped curiously into the great drawing-room and the library before going out on the terrace.

There she stood, bathed in the golden sunlight, drinking in beauty and fragrance in gasps of ecstasy.

It seemed like a dream that she should be here: that her audacious request should have been so readily granted. All fear of the stern and cynical owner of Knockrea had left her. She was firmly convinced in her own mind that she had some claim upon him—that she would be protected, sheltered, cared for, and placed in a position to realize her ambitions.

Childhood accepts even the improbable without question, and Kitty, as she walked along over close-shaven emerald lawns, and under the cool shading of the trees, was saying in her heart, "I, too, may be rich some day," and believed what she wished to believe.

Her mind was fanciful and barbaric, and outward splendor appealed to it. Her feminine instinct told her she had beauty, and already she had learnt something of its power—where men were concerned.

The passionate propulsions of her nature drew her irresistibly on toward luxury, wealth, show and glitter. For sake of them all softer and more generous emotions were thrust back and stifled.

Before she had spent a week at Knockrea House she was as much at home in it as if all her life had been spent there.

To Philip Marsden she was at once a study and a revelation. Her aptitude and quickness amazed him—her conceit and ambition amused. He made no attempt to correct or check her. She was allowed to do what she pleased, and he studied and analyzed her as if she were some curious product of Nature.

At the end of a week Biddy came to see her. She was more astonished than ever at the change in the child—the ease with which she had accommodated herself to her new surroundings. But her heart sank within her as she received the careless greeting, and marked the indifference as to her doings or her welfare which every word betrayed.

Kitty was full of herself—of the comforts and luxuries of her new life, which had now become second nature—of the new clothes Mr. Marsden had ordered for her to wear—of the toys and books he had given her—the pony she was learning to ride—the beautiful Irish setter which had usurped in her fickle affections the place of poor, half-blind Tim.

Biddy listened with an aching heart.

The mischief was done now, she felt ; it could never be undone. Whatever Mr. Marsden's motives, he had effectually changed the whole mental attitude and nature of the child toward herself. Kitty could never again be content with a poor home—a hard-working life—the bread of toil—the simple offerings of affection.

There was no influence about her great enough to counteract the ill-advised whim that had drawn her into a whirlpool of vain and selfish pleasures—excitement—desires. Whether as a test or a temptation, Philip Marsden's experiment was a cruel one. It might send out the object of it to face an ordeal no feminine thing is strong enough to face alone. It might be fostering the natural audacity of ignorance, in order to deal a blow at once sharp and sudden at the unprepared and unexpected head now raised in proud defencelessness.

Biddy looked on with a kind of terror. She could not have said what she feared, but she did fear—something.

As she left the great house and went back to her lonely cottage, she knew that her child had been taken from her for ever—that never again would she return to humble poverty and security. Her choice had been made—and she must abide by it now.

To the old woman herself, used to the careless freedom of a roving life—loving wandering as any gipsy might love it for sake of its change of scene, and motion, and unrest—it seemed unnatural that the child should have voluntarily chosen to cage herself, to suffer her wings to be clipped, and her freedom destroyed.

She could not understand the mystery of hereditary instincts—nor why a child reared as Kitty had been reared should pine

for wealth and power and splendor. She could only gaze at the future with blank despair, and wonder what womanhood would bring; only sit by the dim turf fire in the long lonely nights, and stare with prophetic eyes at the visions it seemed to show her, while the creature she had loved so passionately drifted farther and farther away from her on the sea of a new life.

She never blamed the child. She loved her none the less for all the pain she had caused her—the ingratitude with which she had rewarded her faithful heart. To lose her—to let her go to others—was torture well-nigh unbearable, but she came of a race inured to sorrow—made strong in the fires of endurance.

She wept alone—counted her beads in the firelight—and prayed for heaven's choicest blessings on the fickle heart that had forsaken her!

CHAPTER XVIII.

"A YEAR—a whole long year," exclaimed Lady Ellingsworth, holding her friend's hands in both her own, and gazing fondly at the beautiful eyes giving such tender greeting. "I began to think you would never come."

"But I have at last," said Judith Montessor. "It was not for want of will, my dear. Somehow liberty is not so easy or so possible as we imagine."

"No," sighed Hermia, releasing the hands she had held so long. "It is very strange what fragile threads can be our fetters sometimes. However, since you are here, I must make the most of you. To begin with, take off your wraps and we will have some tea here—alone. I have kept a week clear for you—as far as women are concerned. It is not half long enough, but I cannot help myself."

The two women were in Lady Ellingsworth's boudoir in the dusk of an October evening.

Outside, were rain and mist and chill winds, blowing over a Yorkshire moor; within, all the beauty and comfort that wealth can bring as handmaidens to art.

Judith Montessor threw off her heavy traveling cloak, and went into the adjoining dressing-room for a few moments to remove the dust of her journey, and smooth her hair.

When she returned the cosy tea-table had been wheeled up to the fire, and Lady Ellingsworth was sitting opposite in a loose gown of sapphire blue velvet, trimmed and bordered with silver fox fur.

She looked lovelier than ever, her friend thought, though this past year had added a line to her smooth brow, and taken some of the rich bloom from her face.

But it was a face cast in such noble mould of beauty that time or trouble would never be able to rob it of charm.

"Sit there," she said with a bright smile, pointing to a low, softly cushioned chair near her own. "You must be tired, though you don't look it."

"This is very delightful," said Judith Montessor, glancing round at the countless luxuries and beauties of the beautiful

room. "And very feminine," she added with a smile, as she took her cup of tea from the white slender hands.

"Yes, it is certainly that," said Lady Ellingsworth; "I wonder if any woman could do without tea."

"How is it you don't have it in the hall for the benefit of the sportsmen?" asked Mrs. Montessor.

"I do generally—but I wanted you all to myself to-day," answered her friend. "And now tell me all news of Knockrea—village and house—beggars and hall. My father never tells me anything in his letters."

"Does he not? Have you heard about the interest he has shown in that pretty child: Biddy Maguire's adopted one—Kitty they call her?"

"I know he is paying for her schooling," said Lady Ellingsworth somewhat coldly.

"Oh, but more than that. He had her at the big house for her holidays. Poor Mrs. Kinsale was quite put out about it. She seemed to think it was not the sort of charity to 'begin at home.' And it gave rise to much talk and wonderment in the village. But the child has certainly improved marvelously. She is lovely, and very intelligent."

"How did Biddy Maguire like her desertion?" asked Lady Ellingsworth, sipping her delicately creamed Souchong.

"Well, you know what the Irish are. Too loyal to betray their own feelings at any act of ingratitude. I must say I wondered at Kitty, for the poor Dalin' Woman had been so counting on having her to herself these holidays, and Johanna Reardon went about quoting something to the effect that 'sharper than a thankless child it is to feel a serpent's tooth.'"

The line on Lady Ellingsworth's brow grew deeper.

"It is very ill-judged on my father's part," she said. "Charity is all very well, but one must draw the line at favoritism. Of course, people will wonder, and be ill-natured. Kitty has no more claim on him than any other child in the place. Why should he have singled her out for such marked interest?"

"That is just what they all ask, I am afraid; but, my dear Hermia, your father is a man of singular independence. He has always gone his own way, and done what pleased him best. He is not likely to take the census of popular opinion about any action or whim of his own."

Lady Ellingsworth colored slightly, and put down her tea-cup. Then she changed the subject by asking a few more

questions about her old friends and pensioners. She was more seriously annoyed than she chose to show. She remembered the hints and suspicions to which her father's conduct had given rise when she was at Knockrea, and could not understand why he should choose to commit so quixotic an action as to have this pretty beggar under his own roof.

Was it only a whim?

If so, it was a very cruel one. What was the use of turning life into an enchanted fairy tale, if the end was to be a bitter awakening to poverty and humiliation?

A child reared as Kitty had been—a mere picturesque bundle of rags—with eyes like stars, and a quick tongue, and a shrewd brain—what use to take her out of her own sphere, to teach her discontent and foster her crude ambitions?

She had much of the world's scepticism as to the wisdom or honesty of any purpose that lies beyond the accepted formulas of life and charity. To her, mystery was intolerable, and a kindness unexplained, and seemingly inexplicable, lost all claim on the name.

It really seemed that her father was treating this child much as he would treat a pet dog that he had found straying, and ownerless.

She could not believe that his benevolence had in it any noble or humane motive. He would tire of it, as he had tired of most things in his life—wife and children, friends and relatives, among others.

But she kept these thoughts to herself, and listened with warm interest to the hundred and one trifles that Judith Montessor related, and her friend never guessed that underlying that interest there burnt the fire of an insatiable curiosity respecting Philip Marsden's real reasons for befriending Kitty the Rag.

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As day after day slipped by, the two friends seemed to get more closely united by sympathy and affection. They were like and unlike enough to be of endless interest to one another.

The sins and sorrows of life, the vanity of the world, the loneliness and suffering of individual humanity, were things well known of each. The idiosyncrasies of sex, the inner tragedies of womanhood were alike discussed,

The men composing the house party were a genial fox-hunting, game-potting set, to whom sport meant all that made life interesting, and womanhood all that made it expensive.

They were not men who appealed to either Hermia Ellingsworth or Judith Montessor, and for the first week of the latter's visit the two women were thrown entirely together. It was fortunate, therefore, that they agreed so well, and had so much in common with which to interest or occupy themselves.

It was not long, however, before Judith Montessor noticed that her beautiful friend seemed to regard her husband with the most complete indifference. His doings afforded her no interest, his presence or absence seemed alike unnoticed. She rarely addressed him, except on matters connected with their guests or the affairs of the household, and his dog-like devotion to herself only seemed to annoy her by any outward display.

Judith Montessor felt that there was something radically wrong here, but as her friend never alluded to her domestic concerns she scarcely liked to question her on such a delicate subject.

She knew quite enough of the world to know that happy marriages are the exception, especially among the higher ranks of society. Daughters swayed by the worldly advice of mothers, and given to men about whom they know nothing save that they are an excellent match, are not likely to develop into loving or dutiful wives. Men who are content to buy beauty, or take a wife from motives of self-interest, are also not likely to develop into tender or comprehensive husbands.

Marriage, as instituted by Society, has become at once a shame and a scourge. Its very name is the mark for latter-day satire; its uses and prerogatives are derided; and itself as an institution hedged in by Expediency on the one side, and the Divorce Court on the other.

Judith Montessor, looking forward into a future prescient with feminine insurrection, her own eyes made clear by suffering, saw with many forebodings that her friend was on the side of the coming Insurrectionists. She was actively and morbidly unhappy. Neither her wealth nor her beauty, nor her own gifts of charm and intelligence, could in any way allay the gnawings of her heart's discontent.

A hint here, a word there, showed Judith Montessor much of that inner nature so carefully veiled from all eyes around—

so restless and dissatisfied, so full of bitterness in the present, and doubts for the future.

It was not, however, till the advent of the feminine element in the house party that Lady Ellingsworth really approached self-betrayal. These frivolous *mondaines*, these perfumed, artificial products of nineteenth century society, offended and irritated her at every turn. False to their husbands, capricious to their lovers, living only for luxury and vanity, regardless of honor as of friendship, aping men in dress and pursuits, immoral in mind and sense if not in actual deed—they were an affront and a warning to the sex they at once owned, and degraded, and disclaimed.

“What will they become—what will their children become!” exclaimed Judith Montessor, as she sat alone one night in her friend’s dressing-room, discussing a certain young duchess who had been airing principles of revolt that some years later were destined to become universal.

Lady Ellingsworth shrugged her graceful shoulders under the soft white cashmere of her dressing robe.

“I’m sure I don’t know,” she said. “They seem bent on a revolution of sex. As for their children—judging from what Lady Aldyth said—there will be no children to follow in their footsteps, for maternity is a degradation.”

“And they don’t believe in love—in the sacredness of any tie between man, or woman, or child. They want to make a universal holocaust of accepted morality. Fancy such women governing the country! at the helm of State! Heavens! it is appalling to think of it.”

“Oh, they will never acquire such power as that,” said Lady Ellingsworth. “In the first place the country would not allow female legislators; in the next no body of women would ever act together as men do, for general instead of individual benefit. There is no spirit of *camaraderie* among women as among men. They are innately jealous of one another—of looks, gifts, talents; everything in fact—and such jealousy would breed a legion of foes in every citadel and every camp that had feminine leaders. Then women are not logical. They are too easily biassed, and too readily swayed by mere temporary feelings. Neither do I consider they have fixed principles, or that sort of *esprit de corps* which binds men so closely and enables them to act as a united force.”

“I think you are right,” said Judith Montessor thought-

fully. "Not one woman in a hundred is capable of forgetting herself in any general enterprise or movement. Little petty slights and animosities continually crop up where women are banded together, and underneath seeming friendship there is an inherent animosity. Even in sewing clubs and Dorcas societies, or such purely feminine institutions, there is the constant want of general self-abnegation for the main good. If the same feeling is carried into wider movements—say the clubs they were talking of to-night—I fear they will prove equal failures. A woman may like *one* woman, stick to her, believe in her, befriend her, but I have never found one who is inclined to take the whole sex to her heart in one sisterly embrace. Besides, it is a curious fact that power generally makes a woman tyrannical. Give her a throne, an empire—even the slight fame of the world's appreciation—and she shows herself arrogant and greedy for more, and envious of any rivalry."

"How you have studied the sex, my dear," said Lady Ellingsworth a little bitterly.

"Yes," answered Judith Montessor, "I have had good reason to do so. No one knows a woman but a woman, and we are quite aware of the fact—individually."

"Well, those who are staying here at present are a very bad sample, let us hope," remarked Lady Ellingsworth.

"Why ask them to your house?"

"Oh, my dear Judith, what can I do? Ellingsworth has his set, and I am bound to ask the wives or 'affinities' belonging to them."

"Ah," said her friend gently, "that is what does the mischief. We are never strong enough to set ourselves against the current of conventionalities. It is always a case of 'what has been, must be.' Now, her grace of D'Eyncourt, for example. Could anything be in worse taste than her dress, her manners, or——"

"Her *amours*?" interpolated Lady Ellingsworth. "No, I think not. But then the Duke doesn't mind, and Society has a pretty little fiction concerning the purity of wives who have complaisant husbands."

"It is all very disgraceful and very degrading," said Judith sadly, "and a very dangerous example besides."

Lady Ellingsworth laughed contemptuously.

"Oh!" she said, "it only means the birth of a new era—the Woman's Era. I wonder what she will make of it?"

How signalize her independence? How much private grievances will have to answer for public denunciation of her wrongs, and the injustice so long her portion!"

They both relapsed into silence, each following out a train of thought.

Suddenly, as if mastered by an impulse, Lady Ellingsworth laid her hand on that of her friend.

"Ah, Judith," she said in a low choked voice, "it is good to have one friend in the world, one heart one can depend on, one soul one can trust. A year ago I was so unhappy that I could have matched any of these women for recklessness. I owe it to you that I drew back in time."

"I know you are unhappy," said Judith softly, "and you have all my sympathy, as you know. I will not wrong you by uttering those old platitudes that you have much to be thankful for. A woman is never thankful for an empty life—a heart starved of its natural food. We are poor creatures at best, I think, Hermia, but we are at our worst when we have no ties of love to serve as ballast for our weakness."

"You believe in love?"

"Certainly I do. What woman can help it? But I believe we too often mistake our own love of Love the passion, for love of the individual. A girl's heart is an instrument far too easily turned by skilful fingers—far too easily captured by flattery or compassion. She idealizes her lover because he embodies her dreams of love, because he represents himself as suffering for her sake. Once the lover becomes the husband, she learns the mistake she has made. Only one thing can win her from despair, that awful despair of facing an irrevocable mistake."

"And that?" asked Hermia in a low strained voice.

"Is motherhood, Hermia. I often pity you. That heart-loneliness of yours could be cured only by a child's innocent love. You would be happy then, believe me."

She looked up at the beautiful proud face beside her, and saw it grow suddenly scarlet; flushed and quivering as if with some painful memory.

"You are quite wrong, Judith," she cried fiercely. "Quite. I should hate a child. If one thing could make my life more shameful and unbearable than it is, it would be to know that I had given life to any other creature who would own my wretched sex, or live to curse its father's."

“Hermia, what are you saying?”

The blood ebbed back. The fierce impulse was mastered by the strong will. Lady Ellingsworth leaned back in her chair, both hands pressed against her throbbing heart.

“Don’t tempt me to self-betrayal,” she cried hoarsely. “There is that in my life which would make even you despise me! I am not the creature you fancy me. I am not what the world knows me. I am what my own wretched folly made me. Oh! of all living things that I loathe and shrink from, there is none so worthy my loathing as the thing I call myself.”

Judith Montessor shuddered, and turned pale. “These are strong words,” she said. “Are you sure they are not the mere outcome of morbid feeling?”

Hermia looked at her long and silently.

“If a day ever comes,” she said, “when I can tell you, I will do so. But it will not be easy, and it will cost me all your esteem.”

“You cannot tell,” said Judith gently. “Who am I that I should judge another? Be sure that you may trust me even as yourself. Friendship is no light thing in my eyes.”

“I know that, or I could not have spoken as I have done.”

She sighed deeply; the eyes that rested on the leaping fire flames grew suddenly dim.

“Oh, wretched fate to be a woman!” she cried bitterly. “A thousand sins sit more lightly on a man’s shoulders, than one mistake may do on ours!”

CHAPTER XIX.

FOR days and nights following that strange self-betrayal, Judith Montessor pondered often and deeply on what it meant.

The usual interpretation that she would have put upon it, had it been uttered by any other woman, was not the interpretation she could apply to any act of Hermia Ellingsworth's, in the past or present. Yet she felt there was something wrong, some secret care gnawing at that proud heart, some memory of wrong inflicted or committed that lay like a canker under the surface splendor of that outward life.

She never asked her confidence. She never, as days slipped into weeks, even alluded to that half-uttered confession.

Strong of heart and loyal of nature as few women are, she preferred to trust to time and Hermia's own feelings for its renewal. Some day the veil would be withdrawn from that secret shrine; some day the story would be told. She waited in patience, betraying by no word or look the trouble at her own heart, the dread that behind these present smiling skies there lurked dark clouds of storm.

For she saw there was something reckless and strange about Lord Ellingsworth. She heard whispers of debts, of floating "paper," of the wanton extravagance that characterized his own and his wife's expenditure; rumors feeble and idle as straws upon the wind, but like the straws indicative of the direction in which the wind was blowing.

Meanwhile the lavishness and luxury of the life at Yarrow could scarcely have been equalled by that at Chatsworth, or Welbeck. Added to this, Ellingsworth's racing stables cost him a small fortune, and as yet the wonderful colts that issued thence had only succeeded in just "missing" the winning post by several seconds. To Judith Montessor, as an on-looker, it seemed that no fortune, however princely, could stand against the luxuries and claims, the follies and extravagances, which marked the life at Yarrow Court. She dared not utter her fears, but insensibly a note of warning crept into her conversations with her friend. At first Hermia smiled in

serene incredulity. It seemed to her that Ellingsworth's fortune was an Aladdin's lamp, whose capacities were inexhaustible. He had never given her the slightest hint of difficulties, and she would as soon have thought of interfering with his expenditure as with his nightly "baccarat" or "loo."

She never thought that a capital such as Ellingsworth's might be encroached upon to a ruinous extent. She never reflected that only to fortunes amassed by trade and kept going by an ignored and successful business, is immunity from failure possible. It seemed to her that such wealth as they possessed could never fail them, and she laughed to scorn any hint or suggestion of her more prudent friend.

People came and stayed for shooting parties, or races, and were entertained in princely fashion. The nightly card parties meant losses and risks that were appalling to contemplate. Money was spent like water on every luxury or vanity of the moment, and neither host nor hostess ever seemed to remember that there might be such a thing as a day of reckoning in the future.

When Judith Montessor had been a month at Yarrow, she began to hint at departure. Lady Ellingsworth, however, would not hear of it. She brought a battery of arguments and persuasions to bear on her friend, and in the end persuaded her to remain a fortnight longer. The last three days of that fortnight witnessed the departure of the last house party before Christmas, and the two women were glad to be once more alone.

The first day of their *solitude à deux*, Lord Ellingsworth had gone to a meet at some distance. He would not be home till dark, and his wife, coming back from a drive about five o'clock, ordered tea in the boudoir, instead of in the hall as usual.

A slight, fine rain had begun to fall, and the wind had risen as the day closed in. Lady Ellingsworth drew closer to the fire, and shivered.

"How I hate the winter," she said, "and how I hate this place! As soon as you are gone, I shall make Ellingsworth come to Nice with me. If only you would come too, Judith," she added with a faint sigh.

"Oh, my dear, you have had quite enough of me," said Mrs. Montessor, "and I really think you ought to give a little of your society to your husband. I fancy sometimes he feels a little jealous."

“Jealous!” Hermia raised her beautiful head, and looked in unaffected surprise at the speaker. “My dearest, what can you mean? Jealous of whom—or what?”

“Of every one who monopolizes you—of every claim that seems to engross you and exclude him.”

“Oh, nonsense,” said Lady Ellingsworth sharply. “He cannot expect me to be for ever by his side.”

“I think you are never by his side at all,” said her friend quietly.

“We have so little in common,” went on Lady Ellingsworth. “The things that interest him don’t interest me. He only cares for horses, or gets excited over cards. Now I cannot feel like that. There seems something cruel in the way they train those beautiful ‘two-year-olds’ of his, and stable talk has no interest for me, and I hate cards.”

“Yes, I know you never play. But still, have you tried to find out whether Lord Ellingsworth has any other interests? Whether there is not some common ground of sympathy on which you might meet?”

Lady Ellingsworth looked frankly astonished.

“My dearest Judith,” she said, “surely you have seen enough of us both to judge our tastes and opinions. There is no such thing as a common meeting ground for us. Ellingsworth is of the earth earthy. He has no soul and very little intellect. Rugby and Oxford didn’t do much to develop either, and trainers and jockeys have been hardly more successful. Why, when we are alone we haven’t a single subject of mutual interest to talk about. We are ready to yawn our heads off in a *tête-à-tête* of ten minutes’ duration. The reason we are such good friends is that we see each other as seldom as possible.”

“Oh, Hermia! that is society cant, not your true self speaking.”

Lady Ellingsworth put down her cup abruptly.

“As I live, Judith, it is the truth. Oh! I know it sounds unfeeling, hateful—but I can’t help it. I married him without a particle of love for him, and marriage has not awakened the feeling I lacked. It has been a continual effort, this life we lead. Sometimes I have thought I could not bear it; I must break down!”

She clasped her hands tightly; her eyes filled with tears.

“It is all my own fault, of course. I know that. I married him to satisfy ambition; for peace, for safety.”

“Safety, Hermia?”

“Can’t you understand the sort of desperate feeling that makes a woman want to get away from herself, from her own misery, her own surroundings? That makes her take even a man’s love as a refuge?”

“I can understand, but I feel sorry for the man.”

“He knew. I told him. Do not fancy I deceived him, Judith. But he was content with a one-sided bargain. He should not complain now.”

“Does he? I have never heard him.”

“Then what made you say you thought he was unhappy?”

“I judged from his face, his manner. No one could help seeing he adores you, Hermia, or that——”

“That I don’t adore him?”

“Yes, that is how the situation strikes me. I am prepared to take a common-sense view of marriage, but if there is a lack of love, at least there should be friendship, companionship, sympathy, to make up for that loss. Now you, it seems to me, have nothing.”

“You forget,” she said bitterly, “my splendid position, my wealth, my diamonds!”

“If you lost these?”

“Lost them? My dear Judith, what an absurd idea! How could I lose them? They are substantial realities, which love is not. They are my part of the bargain; I should consider Ellingsworth had shamefully defrauded me if there was any likelihood of my ever losing them!”

“You talk as if you were quite heartless, Hermia. I do not believe you mean it. I have not studied you, cared for you, only to find that you are a selfish *mondaine*, like her wicked little grace of D’Eyncourt.”

For a moment Lady Ellingsworth was silent. Her eyes were still on the glowing coals; the light played upon her tightly clasped fingers, and on the plain, thick band of her wedding ring. She wore no other to-night.

“Perhaps I am only heartless,” she said at last, “where men are concerned.”

“Then you have loved an unworthy one. Nothing hardens us like such an experience.”

“No,” said Lady Ellingsworth in a strange suppressed voice, “he was not unworthy—but I lost him. We were separated. We shall never meet again this side the grave.”

"Death," said Judith Montessor slowly, "is not always so final as unworthiness. Perhaps your heart will not be always hard to all men because you have lost—one."

A shiver, as of sudden cold, ran through Lady Ellingsworth's slender frame.

"I must make what I can of my life," she said. "I have no one to blame for its past or present suffering save myself. Only," and her eyes fell on the gold circlet on her third finger, "only," she went on hurriedly, "don't ask me to pretend I love my husband. I was never a hypocrite; I can't begin to be one now. If he is unhappy I am also unhappy. If he regrets he must surely remember it is his own fault. I have given him all he asked for; more he has not the right to expect, or I the power to grant."

"I think," said Judith Montessor, with sudden passion, "that of all legal institutions there is none so hateful as marriage. It makes us slaves, or criminals. It turns us into hypocrites to good men, and passive dupes to bad ones. Knowingly or unknowingly, we forge the fetters of an endless misery when we give ourselves to a lifelong union."

"Was your marriage so unhappy then?"

"Unhappy!" She lifted her head for a moment, then as suddenly it dropped on her clasped hands, and there was silence.

In the midst of that silence a sound as of muffled feet, of heavy tread, came suddenly on the still night air.

The plash of falling rain was audible. The fitful wind had died away into faint moaning. Lady Ellingsworth found herself wondering what was the meaning of the sounds. It was too late for visitors, and Ellingsworth rarely came up the drive. His habit was to leave his hunter at the stables.

Then a bell pealed. She heard the door opened; she glanced at her friend; and then, bending forward, she lightly touched the clasped fingers.

"Judith," she said softly, "Judith."

Mrs. Montessor lifted her face. It was ashy white.

At that moment a knock came at the door, and a footman entered.

"Your pardon, my lady," he said, and there was something strange and flurried in his manner and his voice, "there is a gentleman in the hall wishes to speak to you."

"To me? Who is it? What is his name?" asked his mistress haughtily.

“His name,” said the man, “is Dr. Wrenford. There has been an accident, my lady, and my lord is badly hurt.”

Hermia rose slowly and unsteadily and faced the man.

“An accident?” she said faintly.

Judith Montessor sprang to her feet and went toward her.

“I will go down with you,” she said.

The footman drew back to let them pass. Even his impassive face betrayed what that accident meant; the one, the only accident that opens the gates of life to everlasting freedom!

CHAPTER XX.

THEY had brought him home—dead.

He had broken his neck taking one of the stiffest fences. A slip, a jerk of rein, and then that sickening, horrible “thud” which no man who has once heard it ever quite forgets.

Death had been almost instantaneous. They had taken him to the nearest doctor’s, but all knew it was hopeless even before the eye of science had glanced at the impassive face. Dr. Wrenford accompanied the body home in order to break the news to Lady Ellingsworth.

She received it with that frozen calm which is at once a comfort and a puzzle to those who look for a woman’s hysterical grief.

She felt as if she had not a tear to shed, but a bitter wave of remorse swept over her heart as she gazed at that quiet face, that motionless figure, and remembered that even as he had looked his last on life she had been saying such hard and cruel things about him.

She felt a loathing and contempt for herself beyond the power of words; and into the feeling there crept a fear of that destiny she had evoked, and by whose hand her fortunes and her future would be shaped.

She stood alone by the dead man’s side and tried to realize what had happened. It was an hour when sophistry and false faiths fell, shivered by the touch of the spear of truth. Then she peered into the dim chasm of the future, and wondered where he was, what he had learnt, how that wonderful vitality and joyousness of his could have sunk into this unbreakable silence.

Had he learnt her secret? Could he, even at this very moment, be looking down at her from some vault of space, reading her heart, knowing her as she knew herself?

She shivered with deadly fear, and threw herself beside the couch on which that rigid form lay stretched.

“Ellingsworth,” she whispered, “can you hear? Do you know at last? Can you forgive? Can you not make some sign? Are you so far away—already?”

She raised her eyes, wide and strained, to the impassive face. Her hand touched the marble cold of lifeless fingers. Against the oriel window fell the rain like heavy tears, and round the great desolate mansion sighed the moaning wind.

She rose, trembling with fear and cold alike.

She moved slowly away, her face turned to his, that for the first time in their lives together, had no smile of welcome, no light of love.

"I am sorry now, Ellingsworth," she said again in that strange whisper. "Oh! believe it, believe it—if God will let you hear."

Nothing broke the silence but the moaning wind.

A terror of that dumb figure, of the mystery and stillness now for ever its portion, swept over her tortured nerves. Her hand was on the door handle. She felt a strange throbbing in her throat. She longed to cry, to speak, but could not. Iron bands seemed to hold her in their clasp, while all her straining forces fought against them. And still her eyes were on that inert form. She could not turn her back upon it, or get away.

Suddenly all grew dark around, and from the darkness it seemed to her that a face looked forth, white and strangely radiant. Closer it came and closer, and involuntarily her hands went out as if to press it back and away into the cloud from whence it had issued.

A shrill cry of terror broke from her lips.

"Judith!" she cried, and fell prone upon the floor, clasped in the gathering darkness that had engulfed her swooning senses.

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The blinds were drawn, and the great mansion given up to mourning and decorous desolation.

Cards, and wreaths, and condolences were showered on the beautiful young widow, and in due time the last great ceremony of all took place with proper state and form.

Then came the prose of actual realities, the arrival of men of business, the "looking into" affairs long neglected and now in well-nigh hopeless entanglement; the peering and prying and investigation that daily and hourly revealed worse complications. In the end the brief announcement was made that the late lord's affairs were as bad as they well could be; that apart from her settlements his wife had nothing.

The heir, a penurious, semi-æsthetic youth, now at Christ Church, came down to Yarrow in a state of righteous indignation at his late cousin's follies and extravagances, and in the end the horses were sold, the retainers dismissed, and Lady Ellingsworth found herself a female Ichabod returning sadly to her father's roof once more.

She need not have gone there, but in her desolation and loneliness her heart yearned for her Irish home and her Irish friends. Besides, she would be near Judith Montessor, the one creature to whom she had turned for comfort and sympathy in those first days of desolation; the one creature who had given her both freely and unstintingly, as only a generous nature can give.

Trouble and sorrow had drawn them closer together even than before, and after a few days spent at Knockrea, Lady Ellingsworth announced to her father that she intended to take a house in the neighborhood and live in Ireland altogether.

The announcement did not seem to please him. Of course he could not prevent her doing what she chose, but he raised every possible and impossible objection to her remaining in the neighborhood of Knockrea.

The most reasonable one, and the one presenting the greatest difficulty, was that there was no suitable house to be found.

But even that was conquered in the course of a few months. It turned out that a certain Desmond Moira, possessor of a large house and encumbered estate, was anxious to dispose of both on lease.

Lady Ellingsworth's lawyers arranged for the subletting of this property to their client, and as soon as the necessary formalities had been gone through she took up her abode at Mount Moira.

At her first glance around Hermia discovered that she would have endless occupation in altering, restoring, and rearranging her new home. Most ancient families in Ireland suffer from impecuniosity, and the Moiras had been no exception. Things had gone from bad to worse during the twenty years that Desmond Moira had occupied Mount Moira. He had never had enough money for himself or his rapidly increasing family, leaving alone such trifles as the papering or decorating of mouldy rooms, the repairing of fences, the culture of gardens or orchard, the roofing of cabins, or the general welfare of tenants.

To have secured a good tenant, a good rental, and immunity

from the duns, debts, and difficulties so long his portion, were indeed things to be grateful for.

He was duly and daily grateful for them in a land far removed from Erin's treacherous skies and uncertain inhabitants, and by a happy concord of circumstances Lady Ellingsworth was equally grateful for being enabled to play the Lady Bountiful to those warm-hearted, eccentric, and poverty-stricken beings whom she loved more than she loved anything on earth.

The best, and, indeed, only remedy for sorrow is constant occupation. It is the people who have nothing to do in life and "do it with all their hearts" that become hypochondriacs and melancholists. To Hermia Ellingsworth the days were scarcely long enough for the thousand and one duties and cares which filled up her time.

She had money enough to make her house beautiful, and to administer countless charities on a system organized by Judith Montessor and herself. The system was less appreciated than the gifts, as might be expected, for the lower-class Irish are decidedly not a well-regulated order, and prefer a coin thrown haphazard which costs no more trouble than a blessing, to a useful or more beneficent form of charity.

But Lady Ellingsworth was decidedly popular, and she understood the people thoroughly for all her seeming pride and coldness. The poor and the suffering never found her proud, or felt her cold to their sorrows.

Her first year at Mount Moira was one of peace, and of mental and bodily occupation that insensibly were of immense benefit. People wondered a little at first that she was so seldom at her father's or that he so rarely came to her; but after deciding that it was none of their business, and then inventing a hundred and one theories to account for it, they accepted the fact as it stood, and put it down to English coldness of heart.

Philip Marsden had never been popular. He was less so than ever by contrast with his daughter, and her far more free and easy style of living.

Meanwhile it seemed to Hermia that rest and peace were at last her portion, and happiness more nearly hers than it had been since her childhood.

The companionship of Judith Montessor, the delight of living among old friends, and amidst familiar scenes, more than compensated for the bitterness of memories that lay in the background of both. The calls and claims of society were

here unheard and unheeded. The restless, artificial life she had so long led, faded like a dream into the present useful and simple and well-ordered days that made up the sum of existence.

"If it might only last; if the future would only be like the present, I should be quite content," she said one night to her friend, who had been dining at Mount Moira.

"Would you? Then you are more easily contented than I imagined. What about society?"

"I have as much society here as I wish for."

"But it is not the society you have been accustomed to. Irish people, at least in this part of the world, are not very intellectual. Their minds seldom soar above their own or their neighbors' concerns. Social intercourse here means a great deal of gossip, flavored by strong personalities, and very little conversation."

"I think there is usually a great deal of conversation," said Lady Ellingsworth smiling.

"Ah, no, my dear, that is just what there is *not*. Talk is not conversation. Do you never get tired of discussing what people do, or have done, or are going to do? Of moving round and round in a circle so narrow that it always brings you back at a given time to the starting point?"

"If the circle is narrow," said Lady Ellingsworth, "at least it is not so vicious or so selfish as the one I have left."

"You would not care to go back?" asked Judith Montessor in a low voice.

"No, never again, never again."

She shuddered, and her eyes fell on the black folds of her gown.

"It is all over, all done with. It was a mistake, a false thing from the first. I have escaped. I can breathe the air of freedom at last. Does a prisoner once released ever seek the prison and the shackles again, Judith?"

"No, not often; unless circumstances drive him to it."

"No circumstances," she said with a shudder, "could ever drive me back to—marriage. It is strange," she continued presently, "that I always find myself pitying him now. He was so little to me, and yet our lives were linked together, and I was so much to him. And I never troubled, I never cared. I never tried to influence him. I never showed him as much sympathy as I would to my horse, or my dog! And the strangest part of all was that I never felt any sense of my own

heartlessness till—till that awful day when I saw him lying there so cold and still. Oh, Judith, why can't our dead come back even for an hour, a moment? Why can't they tell us something—a word, only a word? Just, 'I forgive!' How much it would mean, what hours of misery it would save!"

"Yes," said Judith Montessor thoughtfully, "it would. One cannot help wondering whether mercy or judgment has made death the terrible thing it is. It would have been so easy to make the border land just faintly visible, one thinks; to have left the possibility of a sign or message before the gates were for ever closed."

"I thought that," cried Hermia eagerly. "I called to him, I prayed to him. It seemed impossible he could have gone so far away that no word of mine could reach him. Judith, do you think the dead know everything about us once they pass into the other life? Our secrets—our sins——"

Her voice was almost a whisper. She glanced half fearfully round the great room, with its dim corners and shadowy recesses.

"My dearest, I cannot tell any more than yourself," answered Mrs. Montessor. "The wisest men cannot tell; they can only surmise, theorize, build up hopes on the foundation of Christ's words; those words which we deny in act every day of our lives, by way of proving our right to be called Christians."

Hermia sighed heavily. "I wish I knew," she said, and a sudden scarlet glow leapt to her face as she met her friend's inquiring gaze.

"Is there something you are afraid of his knowing, Hermia?"

"Yes," she said, "there is. I have a secret in my life that I can tell to no one—that I have told to no one. The thought that torments me now, and always, Judith, is the wonder if he knows, if he despises me, as God knows I despise myself!"

She covered her face with her hands, as if to hide that burning flush.

Judith Montessor looked at her in silence and perplexity. They had never strayed so near the border-line of mystery as this. In all the wild words of self-reproach Lady Ellingsworth had heaped upon herself at that terrible time, she had never betrayed a personal reason for them. A strange fear crept into her friend's heart now.

“I won’t ask you anything, Hermia,” she said. “There are some things which a woman ought never to tell, I think—things that concern her own honor, or another’s. I will only say, don’t allow yourself to get morbid over fancied errors. We are all weak in a greater or less degree. We all sin in one way or another ; most women call it gaining experience. I think you and I are too candid to clothe our sins so lightly, but we feel the sting of them all the more.”

“I used to wonder,” said Hermia, dropping her hands again on her sombre crape, “what it meant about the ‘worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.’ I think I know now.”

CHAPTER XXI.

DURING these months at Knockrea, Hermia had never spoken to her father on the subject of Kitty the Rag.

The child had returned to school long before she had come back to Ireland, and as Philip Marsden never alluded to the subject she felt disinclined to introduce it.

Mount Moira was a considerable distance from the great house and the village, and once established there, Lady Ellingsworth saw very little of her father.

Biddy Maguire was away on some of her journeys, so they had not met as yet, and though Lady Ellingsworth often thought of the child she never spoke of her to any one, even to Judith Montessor.

It happened, however, that one evening she was dining with her old friend, Dr. Carrick, and he brought up the subject what time he lingered over his fruity old port, and famous wall fruit.

"You know, of course," he said, "that your father is educating that pretty, wild creature of Biddy Maguire's. There's quite a transformation scene now. I hardly knew her when I saw her. She's at a school in England—but to every one's surprise he let her spend her holidays at the house. Myself, I thought it a mistake, and none too grateful of the child to so quickly turn her back on old friends. 'Twas just about this time last year. Have you heard whether she will be here again?"

"No," said Hermia, "I never speak about her to my father. It is a whim of his, I suppose. I remember the child well. She was a lovely, wild-looking elf, and intelligent it seemed to me."

"Intelligent? Faith, she is that," laughed the doctor. "Sharp as a needle and quick as a monkey. It's odd that no one has ever got the rights of her story yet. Biddy Maguire is as close as a burr on that point."

"Perhaps," said Hermia, "there is no story to get at. People are too ready to make a mystery out of nothing."

"Irish people especially," said Dr. Carrick, with a twinkle in his eye. "And in this little hole too, where they've none

too much to do, or to talk about. I often wonder, my dear Hermia, why you have returned to us. Young, beautiful, free—with all the world before you—it seems a sort of exile to bury yourself here in an out-of-the-way Irish village.”

“It is my native place,” said Hermia quietly, “and I care for it more than for any other I have known. A few loving hearts and one or two true friends, doctor, are more to me than the false brilliance of society.”

“It is a wise choice,” he said, “but a strange one.”

“It does not seem strange. You forget that I have *lived* more in my few years of exile, than you quiet folk do in half a century.”

Dr. Carrick sipped his wine thoughtfully. “Ah, well,” he said, “of course you have only yourself to please, and a woman can always do that. You like Mount Moira, don’t you? I shouldn’t advise you to spend too much money on the place. You’ll get no thanks, and certainly no interest for your outlay.”

“I have money enough,” she said, “to spend a few thousands on improving the estate. I feel so sorry for the people—they are such a poverty-stricken, neglected race of beings. I rode over to Mountreath the other day to see some refractory tenants who had not paid any rent for six years, but when I got to their cabin I hadn’t the heart to say a word. Such poverty and misery! Oh! it was terrible. One couldn’t have the heart to ask them to pay for their wretched hovel, and their few barren acres. Dr. Carrick, why couldn’t something be done for Ireland? Surely there is something very wrong about our laws—our system? In England you never see such grinding poverty, such wretchedness and want as you do here. I mean in the agricultural districts.”

“No,” he said, “I suppose not. But you ask me a difficult question, Hermia—one that has puzzled the wisest heads in the two countries. Of this I feel sure, that if Ireland was lifted out of its present slough of difficulty, freed of debts, set on its legs so to speak, to work for itself, things would be exactly the same in two years as they are now. The poorer classes are a priest-ridden, superstitious race, kept in wilful ignorance, and inherently lazy. ‘Sufficient for to-day’ has always been the motto of an Irishman, and it is the vengeance of all their ignored ‘to-morrows’ that exacts so much suffering and misery.”

“But the priests are very kind—very good.”

“That may be; they do their best, I have no doubt, but it is an odd fact that all countries held in the trammels of the Romish Church are miserable and poor, and in a perpetual state of anarchy and confusion. Ireland, Spain and Italy are signal examples, and France is not far behind. Entire freedom of religious thought is essential to the progress and welfare of every country.”

“We have that in England,” said Hermia. “Heaven knows there are sects and religions enough there to drive any thinking soul distracted. But do you believe they are a whit more moral or virtuous in the relationships of life, or the transactions of business, than other nations? They claim to be so; but surface morality is one thing and spiritual another. The outward hypocrisy of the life I have seen is the most perfect confutation of a boastful Christianity, for ever clutching at self-interest and pleasure, ready to sacrifice every one and everything for its own gain. Individual life, lived purely and simply for the general welfare, is the only thing worth calling religion—the thing that Christ preached, the thing men find impossible. They glorify the Cross in our churches—the outward symbol of our Lord’s degradation—but it is as much the sign of our rejection of Him to-day, as it was when the Jews raised it on the slopes of Calvary!”

Dr. Carrick looked at her wonderingly. This was a new Hermia indeed—one who had thought and lived, and looked *below* life, not merely on it.

In his quiet, humdrum life such thoughts rarely intruded. He, too, had accepted the “sufficient for the day” theory as at once the most comfortable and least troublesome. Hermia’s words disturbed him somewhat, and puzzled him too.

There seemed something incongruous in a young, beautiful woman taking life so seriously, and so cynically. Happiness does not trouble about the large outside element of suffering, rising mist-like above the surface of life. It is pain that stirs the soul from its sleep of content—pain that for ourselves or our fellow-sufferers usurps the throne of peace, and keeps its subjects in perpetual conflict for evermore.

Was she unhappy, he wondered, or were words like these the mere outcome of impersonal feeling—the fruit of others’ thoughts?

He looked at her as she leant back in her chair, apparently forgetful of his presence, absorbed in her own reflections.

If he could have read her thoughts he would have seen that

she was back in memory with that awful hour that had first brought her face to face with the mystery of death. That still her heart for ever asked one question of the silence—"Do you know? . . . Can you forgive?"

Some moments are epochs in our lives—facing us unexpectedly, disarming our weakness, showing us *ourselves* as we had not seen or known we were.

Such a moment—such an epoch had Hermia known. It had changed her, roused her, forced her to think of that future to which death is the life. Darkness was over her soul, and to and fro it tossed helplessly on an uncertain sea, lost in a mist of confusion, seeking in vain for anchorage among the thousand creeds and faiths scattered broadcast at the choice of humanity.

The old doctor's voice roused her at last from her train of thought.

"We seem to have wandered a long way from Irish differences," he said, "and it is growing dark. Shall we go into the drawing-room, and will you give me some music? You know how I love it. I asked Mrs. Montessor and the rector to come in by-and-by for a game of whist; but if you are kind you will let me hear 'She is far from the land' or 'The Castle of Dromore' before they come."

She rose at once and they went into the old-fashioned drawing-room, where the candles were lit. The soft glow of the twilight was resting on the garden, and through the open windows gleamed the pale saffron tints of the sky where the sickle of a young moon was faintly outlined.

Hermia seated herself at the piano and then blew out the candles on either side. "I can sing better in the dusk," she said, "and I am going to sing you something new for a change. I learnt it in London."

She struck a few chords, and he drew up his chair to the window and leant back in an attitude of contemplated enjoyment.

The wooing softness and sweetness of Hermia's voice seemed to have gained new depth and pathos since he had last heard it. He did not know the song she sang, but its melancholy and beauty went to his heart and made his eyes grow dim as he listened.

As the closing notes fell on the air, the loud peal of the house-bell rang out shrilly. The doctor looked uneasily at the door.

"It sounds like a summons," he said. "Pity the sorrows of a poor country doctor, Hermy, who can't call an evening his own. Well?"—as the door opened, revealing the startled face of Moll Doherty—"what is it, Molly? Mrs. Flannaghan taken bad?"

"No, sir! It's a man from Knockrea House. There's been an accident, he sez. The carriage is sent for ye, sir."

She looked apprehensively at Hermia's face. It turned a shade paler.

"An accident! To whom?" she exclaimed.

"Shure, ma'am, an' I'm thinkin' it's the masther who's bad. He was shot at to-night as he was sittin' in his own library chair. That's what Riley the coachman sez."

"Shot at!"

Hermia grew deadly pale. She turned impulsively to the doctor.

"Let me go with you," she entreated. "I may be of use. How fortunate that I am here."

He nodded. "Very well," he said. "I'll be ready in a moment. Shot at! Good heavens! what an awful thing! I thought those rascals had grown tired of outrages by now."

Hermia said nothing. The old housekeeper brought her cloak and put it round her, and kept up a running fire of ejaculations and condolences, but Hermia paid no heed.

She was thinking how strange it was that in two instances she had been summoned by accidents within so short a time. Was this to be a fatal one also?

The doctor bustled back, a case of instruments in his hand.

"Courage, my child," he said cheerfully. "Things may not be so bad. I hope they'll catch the scoundrel, though. It is cowardly wretches like these that bring disgrace and discredit on Ireland as a nation."

Still Hermia was silent.

She followed him out and entered the waiting carriage, and in the soft hush of the summer night they drove through the village and up the steep road, lying white in the starshine, to where Philip Marsden lay stricken and bleeding in his stately home, the victim of his own pride and self-sufficiency.

CHAPTER XXII.

HERMIA waited in the library while the doctor was with her father. A hateful half-hour of suspense passed, enlivened only by Mrs. Geoghagan, who persisted in giving details of the catastrophe, of a singularly vivid and horrifying description.

Philip Marsden had just left the dining-room and entered the library, and was standing by the table reading some papers (they lay there blood-bespattered on the same table) when a shot was fired at him through the open window. The footman had heard it, and hastened into the room to find his master lying prostrate across the table.

In the hurry and confusion no one had thought of following or tracing the perpetrator of the deed, consequently he had made good his escape long before the doctor had been summoned.

Hermia listened in sad bewilderment to this recital. She had long known her father was unpopular, but had never imagined his unpopularity would have such results. For long the country had been comparatively free from such outrages, whether committed by Ribbonmen, or Fenians. At Knockree there were a few discontented rebels, but even they had satisfied themselves with loud talk and public meetings, ending up to the satisfaction of all concerned with a general row.

Philip Marsden had been an excellent if somewhat strict landlord. His property, as before said, was the finest and best kept in the county—a credit to the farming and the management alike. But the people had never looked upon him as anything but an interloper. He belonged to the hated Saxon race. He had only inherited this property through his wife, and it is a bitter truth that the “popular” landlord in Ireland is never the man who is most anxious for its welfare, or most earnest in improving the lands and the tenants’ condition; for all this has a claim upon their industry, and is a demand on their rent-paying abilities. They infinitely prefer the spendthrift, careless, fox-hunting, sport-loving individual, whose debts and general impecuniosity are the fruits of his and their own joint carelessness.

But Philip Marsden had been stern, cold, and a strict disciplinarian, neither excusing nor forgiving anything amiss on his lands. He would have no subdividing of plots, no bad or careless farming, countenance no improvident marriages, and extend no elastic limits to "rent day." These virtues found small favor in the eyes of those whom they had really benefited, and threatening voices had of late been raised to warn him of the fact.

Amidst Mrs. Geoghagan's laments and outcries Hermia learned all this, and her heart grew sick with terror, for she knew that, even if this first attempt failed, it would be followed by others, and that all her father's wealth and skill could never draw around him any charmed circle of safety.

When the doctor at last appeared, his news was more reassuring than they had dared to hope. The bullet had been extracted—it had splintered the shoulder blade, but there was every hope of Philip Marsden's recovery, though one arm (the left) would be always affected by the accident. "You may go to him if you wish," continued Dr. Carrick cheerfully, as he turned the bullet over in his hand. "I must keep this," he went on, "it may serve to identify the murderer."

"He is not that—now," said Hermia, as she turned to leave the room.

"Faith then, my child, it's not for want of will," answered the old doctor, as he dropped the messenger of disaster into his bag. "Only five minutes, mind," he added; "it won't do to excite him."

Hermia said nothing, but went slowly up to her father's room, her heart throbbing painfully and wearily at every step.

He was lying back on the pillows; his eyes closed, his face white and drawn, his whole appearance betokening exhaustion and suffering.

A strange wave of tenderness swept over Hermia's heart as she gazed at him. Helpless and stricken, he appealed to her as he had never done before.

She bent over him with eyes tear-filled and compassionate, and gently murmured her grief and horror at the lawless deed for which he suffered.

He opened his eyes and looked at her, but he made no answer. Only his lips closed in a hard set line, and she saw his fingers clutch fiercely at the bedclothes.

Mindful of the doctor's injunctions, she did not disturb him

further, only stooped and lightly kissed his brow. It was cold and damp, and she fancied he seemed to repel her touch even while suffering it.

A sense of her own helplessness, of the wide distance between them that neither time nor affection had bridged, came to her in that moment. Slowly and sadly she left the room and sent the housekeeper to him.

"Don't you think I ought to remain?" she asked Dr. Carrick. "I hardly like leaving him in this critical condition."

"There is nothing to fear," he answered. "He will sleep, I am sure; and if he keeps from fever he will be quite himself in a few days. Mrs. Geoghagan can do all that is necessary. Of course, if you like to come to-morrow, do so, and stay a few days, but there is really no cause for anxiety."

She slowly lifted her cloak and put it mechanically about her shoulders. She felt dazed and stupefied, but through it all was keenly conscious that she was not wanted here; that her father cared nothing whether she stayed, or remained away.

He had never cared much, but now it seemed to her that he cared nothing at all; that the fact of her sympathy with these people—one of whom was his would-be murderer—was only another grievance to the many that had made them antagonists.

She neither spoke nor moved during the drive back to the doctor's. When they reached the house her own carriage was waiting for her, and in the dining-room Judith Montessor and the vicar were keeping each other company, in great anxiety for the news that the doctor might bring.

It was only when she caught sight of her friend's face that Hermia realized how unnerved and shocked she herself was. The rare tears sprang to her eyes. She trembled like a leaf as she sank into a chair, while the doctor's cheery voice related the incident and described the circuit of the bullet.

He and the vicar looked grave over so tragic an incident in their midst, and discussed likely perpetrators of the cowardly deed. As yet, of course, it was all a matter of speculation. The police would have to find a clue, and follow it up on the morrow.

Hermia listened to them, and a vague sense of trouble and responsibility oppressed her. She rose at last; she felt she could bear no more then.

"Come home with me," she said imploringly to Judith. "I couldn't bear to be alone, and I feel as if I should never sleep again."

Dr. Carrick overhearing the strained whisper turned round to her quickly.

"Come, come!" he said. "You mustn't work yourself into a fever over nothing. I'll be round the first thing in the morning, and I'm sure I shall find him all right once more. Try and get a sleep, and then if you really wish you can go over to Knockrea in the morning, and help to nurse him."

Aside he said to Judith Montessor: "Stay with her if you can. She is unhinged, nervous, hysterical. The shock—and then, of course, the memories it must have roused—but you understand her; you'll do her good."

And Judith, sitting beside that still, silent figure during the long drive back to Mount Moira, wondered greatly at the change, and asked herself if, after all, Hermia had been more deeply attached to her father than she had ever suspected.

For her own part, Judith Montessor had always disliked Philip Marsden. She thought him cold, selfish and cynical; a man entirely occupied with his own feelings and desires. She knew that he cared very little for his daughter—that he was, in a measure, jealous of her popularity in a place where he had worked for the same purpose, but without the same success. Hermia, on her side, had spoken very rarely of her father to her friend, and then not in a manner to throw much light on their relative positions.

When they reached Mount Moira they went straight to Hermia's own boudoir. The windows were open to the soft June night. A little spirit-kettle and the appliances for tea were laid out on a table near.

Judith Montessor busied herself in preparing some, while Hermia sat moodily watching her from her low lounging chair.

"Judith," she said suddenly, "my father hates me. I felt that to-night as I have never felt it before. He would rather have strangers about him than me, yet I am his only child now."

"My dear Hermia, what are you saying? Hates you! Nonsense! He is a cold, reserved man by nature, but that may not prevent his having very deep feelings."

"There are things one knows instinctively," said Hermia, "and this is one of them. I am not blaming him. Love can't come at will, or at the call of duty, and I think I was never a lovable child. I only know I was not wanted—I never seemed to have any place at home, and when my mother died no one seemed to care what became of me."

Judith Montessor drew up a chair opposite her friend and looked compassionately at her. The little blue flame in the spirit-lamp wavered to and fro as the soft wind stirred the curtains. The water made a faint hissing noise. Hermia's eyes were on the flickering flame. It seems to her as an emblem of life, driven hither and thither by the wind of circumstances.

"An unhappy childhood is often the prelude to a happy after-life," said Judith gently. "It teaches us self-reliance, and I think makes us value love tenfold when at last it comes to us."

"And there lies its danger!" exclaimed Hermia with sudden passion. "When love comes we are greedy for it; our empty hearts crave for its fulfilment. And then——"

She broke off with a little bitter laugh.

"Ah, well," she said, after a pause, "we are too fond of laying the blame of our own mistakes on the shoulders of others who should have foreseen, or prevented them. But I think sometimes—and I thought again to-night—how different things might have been for me if I had not been so ignorant, so unloved when—when I needed the wisdom of a woman, Judith, and the shelter of a home."

Her face dropped suddenly on her hands. "I cannot tell you more," she said.

"I won't ask it," said Judith compassionately. "And why trouble over the past, dearest? Our mistakes are their own Nemesis; in recalling them we only feel how cruel a thing life can be that sets our feet on the path of error, and effectually prevents us from retracing a false step when our judgment is riper."

"Oh, it is hard and hateful altogether!" cried Hermia stormily. "What do we know—how can we judge—how can we even help ourselves? Like straws on a flood we are whirled to our doom. Malignant demons seem for ever chanting the litany of our sufferings. We grope and search and pray and strive, and in the end we are no nearer truth or peace or conviction; at least that is my condition."

"And mine too, I often think," said Judith bitterly. "I have found no comfort in priest, or Church, or prayer. Life looks like a hopeless madness sometimes. The world seems but a gigantic piece of machinery set agoing by unskilful hands. Some it tosses here and there indiscriminately, some it crushes, some it flings to the winds of chance. A few years of blind struggling, a few dark nights of anguish and regret, and then all is over. Our longest span of life looks in the vastness of what *has* been and *is* to be like the feeble flame of a candle blown to and fro by a passing wind, and then extinguished."

Hermia raised her beautiful head and looked at her.

"Oh!" she said. "How unhappy you must have been once, and yet you seem content and almost happy sometimes. But your experience was that of marriage—mine——"

Again she paused. She was suddenly conscious that her friend was looking at her as she had never looked before.

"Was that of—love?" she whispered inquiringly. "Ah, poor Hermia! I wonder which was worst."

She rose and took the little silver kettle from its stand and slowly and carefully made the tea. They spoke no more until she had poured it into the cups, and brought one to Hermia.

"Drink this," she said. "It will calm you; and then if you take my advice you will go to bed. I shall be near you in the dressing-room. We . . . we mustn't get emotional at this time of night, dearest! Women are too much inclined to be tragic over their sorrows; men are wiser. They drown theirs in work—or drink."

There was an odd little break in her voice. She drank her tea with difficulty and replaced the cup.

"Shall you go to Knockrea to-morrow?" she asked Hermia suddenly.

"Yes! I am not wanted; I am sure he doesn't care whether I go or stay away, but I think it is my duty."

"So do I; and you have all my sympathy. I always admire people who have the courage to perform unpleasant duties; perhaps because I lack that courage myself."

"I should think you would never shrink from one if you thought it right."

"Ah! Hermia, even the worst of us try to make the best of ourselves to the people we care for. I won't rob you of your illusion respecting me yet."

CHAPTER XXIII.

HERMIA slept but badly that night.

It was strange how vividly this accident to her father had recalled the catastrophe which had widowed herself; strange how Ellingsworth's face haunted her through the fevered, sleepless hours that followed her conversation with Judith Montessor.

Toward morning she fell into a heavy sleep, from which she was aroused by the entrance of her maid with her morning tea and letters.

Among the latter was a short note from Dr. Carrick, left by hand, and giving a very favorable report of her father's condition.

She rose and dressed, and went into the morning-room for breakfast. Judith was already there.

Hermia told her of the doctor's note and the good news. "Still, I think I will stay there for a couple of days," she added.

"I wonder who could have done it," said Judith Montessor thoughtfully. "Perhaps when you are on the spot you will be able to learn something. Was there any special person who owed him a grudge?"

"None that I ever heard of," answered Hermia. "He is not what one calls popular, still I had no idea that there was anything like disaffection among the tenants."

"How do you know it was one of the tenants?" asked Judith Montessor.

Hermia looked at her quickly. "Why, who else could it be?" she exclaimed.

"Oh! he may have enemies that we know nothing about," said her friend.

"No one who would try to take his life, I am sure," said Hermia, as she seated herself at the table and poured out the coffee.

"I was thinking," said Judith, "about that child. You were not here, you know, and so you are not aware of the amount of gossip to which her visit at the house gave rise."

Lady Ellingsworth's fair face grew suddenly warm. "People are very ill-natured," she said. "But I can see no reason, Judith, to associate that freak of my father's with this attempt on his life."

Judith said no more. It was a delicate subject, and she did not care to tell Hermia of the very uncharitable surmises it had occasioned in the neighborhood.

They finished their meal in comparative silence. Hermia was feeling miserably depressed and unhinged.

This catastrophe had upset all the peace and tranquillity of the past few months; had brought her face to face once more with that worst side of Irish character, which she had done her best to ignore or excuse. She could no longer do either.

Her father had been right after all. No amount of benefits rendered could in any way atone to these irrational beings for interference with time-honored customs. He was hated by the improvident tenants, the wandering beggars, the lazy, indolent and discontented ruffians whose chief object in life was to stir up riot and dissension wherever they could. He was the model landlord of the county, therefore the most unpopular one.

Still, Hermia had never heard of any special act of harshness on his part; certainly of nothing that merited so treacherous and dastardly a revenge.

It was a hateful thought that the assassin might be lurking in their very village; might, if undiscovered, again repeat his attempt.

When breakfast was finished she drove her friend back in the pony carriage and then went on through the village. It was all astir, and groups were scattered about evidently discussing the previous night's catastrophe. They drew aside and saluted her respectfully as she drove past. Murmurs of sympathy and good will followed her.

Among one group Jim Maguire, dirty and slovenly as ever, was holding forth in his usual revolutionary language. He did not subdue it even out of respect for Lady Ellingsworth.

The policeman was walking along with a new briskness and alertness, born of the consciousness of importance and the recent information that a reward was offered for the discovery or apprehension of the assassin.

It was not at all unlikely that that very assassin was loitering about and listening to the discussion, or standing,

pipe in mouth, before the village "lock-up" reading that notice.

These little incidents just serve to keep things going in Ireland.

When Hermia arrived at the house she was told her father had just sunk off to sleep, after being awake since daybreak. She did not, therefore, enter the sick room. Her own chamber had been prepared by Mrs. Geoghagan's instructions, and thither she went to await any further message or news of the sufferer.

The hours passed slowly and heavily. She found it impossible to settle down to anything.

From time to time rings and inquiries came, as the news spread throughout the neighborhood, and fearful of the noise disturbing her father, she at last went down and ordered the hall door to be left open, and the footman to remain in the hall to answer any summons.

In the afternoon Dr. Carrick came again and saw his patient. He told him of Hermia's arrival, and her intention to stay till he was quite out of danger, but Philip Marsden never expressed any desire to see her.

The doctor was puzzled. This coldness and indifference were so marked that he surmised there must be some reason for them. It pained him to see Hermia's anxious face and hear her eager inquiry: "Did he ask for me?"

"He will be pleased to see you for a few moments," he answered evasively. "But do not expect him to speak much. He is weaker than I imagined."

Hermia promised readily. She felt humiliatingly conscious that her presence here was not welcome—or, indeed, desired. The relations between her father and herself had never seemed so strained as now.

Her nervousness made her seem colder and prouder than ever, as she at last went into that silent room with its faint smell of ether and lavender water—its carefully excluded light, and its paraphernalia of bandages, and medicine bottles and glasses.

"You are better, father? . . . I am so glad," she said gently, as she stood beside him. "I have come to stay here a little while, and give Mrs. Geoghagan a rest."

He opened his eyes and looked at her.

In her soft, plainly-cut black gown, and white collar and cuffs, she looked almost like a nun, or a nursing sister. "I

hope you appreciate your friends *now*!" he said bitterly. "Cowardly brutes! They shall suffer for this if I can discover them. But I believe the police are in league with half the criminals in this country. I've offered £200 reward. I'd double it if I thought there was any chance of catching the rascal."

"Have you no suspicion yourself, father?" she asked. "Is there any one you have offended, or dismissed?"

"I believe it's that impudent scoundrel Jim Maguire," he answered. "I've said he was a disgrace to the place. An idle loafing vagabond, with his mouth full of treason and abuse, prating of wrongs and injustice to all who'll listen. I have given him a piece of my mind more than once."

Hermia paled suddenly. She knew—none better—how little the Maguires had had to thank Knockrea House for. How bitter it must have been to see family, name, and possessions slipping from improvident grasps, and strangers set in the place of those whose blood ran in their own veins.

"Oh, Jim wouldn't have done such a thing!" she cried. "I am sure of it."

"You do well to stick up for the family," sneered Philip Marsden as he turned his head away. "But we have always held contrary opinions as to their merits. I am not likely to change mine now."

She made no reply, only moved across to the window and altered the light to suit his eyes. Then she took a low chair beside it, and occupied herself with some knitting. Her father lay there with closed eyes. She thought he had fallen asleep.

The occupation that kept her fingers busy left her thoughts free. His last words had seriously disturbed her. She knew that Jim Maguire did not bear the best of characters, that for years he had been slowly and steadily deteriorating; but she could not believe he would ever sink to the level of a secret assassin. Still, that her father should suspect him made her uneasy. He had doubtless mentioned that suspicion to others beside herself, and Jim would be watched in the future—a proceeding which would not improve his temper or alter his opinions.

As she knitted on there in the darkened room, she seemed to see fresh troubles opening out before them. Disaffection and discontent spread rapidly in a community, especially when their grievances find no sympathy, and neither their

hearts nor their words are understood by those in authority over them.

She knew that the bodies and souls of his laborers and tenants were of small value in her father's eyes. He only wanted to get as much out of them as was equivalent to the wages he paid, or the terms on which they occupied his farms.

Charity or pity he had none. Always a hard man when his own interests were concerned, he had grown harder and more callous as the years went on.

This present catastrophe, moreover, indicated a distinct phase of unpopularity, and alarmed her for his future safety.

Ignorance makes slaves, but even ignorance cannot keep their eyes for ever bandaged, and it had struck Lady Ellingsworth of late that the peasantry and tenant-farmers were considerably more wide-awake than of yore. The difference between flowers and weeds is the difference of culture. The same sun shines on both, the same soil produces them, yet one is thrown aside as useless, and the other is nurtured and tended to its utmost perfection.

Many black and bitter years of tyranny and unprogression had made Ireland the pitiable thing she was. It seemed no one's province—or in no one's power—to help her to a healthier state. And brooding over wrongs is a dangerous pastime.

Hermia, who understood those people better than her father, longed to tell him that it is such as he who dig the grave of their own order, but as she looked at the face on the pillows set in cold and pitiless defiance she felt it would be useless and hopeless.

Light hearts and heavy labor are not always aliens, but it takes a wise master to keep the one in touch with the other—to yoke them in joint harness—and get the maximum of results at the minimum of cost.

And such a master was *not* Philip Marsden.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PHILIP MARSDEN recovered rapidly, and was soon able to leave his room and go downstairs again.

His illness, however, had had a very bad effect on his never too genial temper. He had grown morose, bitter, and, at times, almost violent. He inveighed against Ireland and the Irish with the utmost virulence. His long-cherished resentment against the poorer and more troublesome classes burst out now with ungovernable fury.

He sent graphic descriptions of the turbulent state of the district to the authorities, and spared no expense in his endeavors to discover the perpetrators of the outrage on himself.

After the lapse of a fortnight, not the slightest clue had been found, and this angered him all the more.

It was useless now for Hermia to preach a policy of temperance. He declared he would have a "Celtic clearance" on the estate, and only let his land to English tenants, or dispose of the whole property and go back to England.

This, however, was an idle threat. He was too closely associated with Knockree—too proud of his own improvements on the "model property" to desert it now.

Besides, he had elaborated a future scheme of vengeance connected with it, as yet known only to himself. He could not afford to forego that, just as matters were ripening for its completion.

Hermia returned to her own home at the end of the week. She felt she had never valued independence so thoroughly as now when she could turn her back on that discontented cynic, and take up her own life, and live it as best pleased herself.

She, at least, had no fear of the people—no hesitation in going among them, scolding, aiding, or compassionating as they needed.

On the night of her return, as she sat reading in her favorite room, she was informed that a woman wished to speak to her—a woman who refused to give her name.

"She looks like a beggar, my lady," concluded the servant.

"Show her up," said Hermia, whose pensioners were in-

numerable, and who rarely sent any one away without seeing them. In a few moments a strange little figure sidled into the boudoir, her small, weird face peering out through the dingy folds of a red shawl.

Hermia recognized her instantly as the Red Hen. "Why, Molly," she said, "is it you? I have been wondering where you were all this time. You have never been to see me since I returned to Ireland."

"God save ye, me lady, and that's the thruth. It's a quare thing altogether, but I nivir knew ye was here at all. Och! 'twas the tears of thankfulness came into me eyes win I heard it. And only yesterday—and me returnin' from me travels—and a dacint-looking woman, dressed quite respectably and standin' at the Maguires' door, she sez to me: 'Truth, thin, Molly, it is yourself come back to Knockrea?' sez she; and I looked hard at her, me sight not being as good as it was, and shure 'twas Biddy Maguire herself, but that worn and thin, and her hair white as snow, the crathur. But for the voice av her, I'd nivir have known her. 'Will ye come in and sit down?' she sez. And av course I did, and 'twas herself told me the news—how ye was here living at the Mount, and that Mr. Marsden had been shot at through the windy av his own room, and, faix, she was cryin' her own two eyes out wid trouble, poor sowl."

"Trouble!" said Hermia, "what has happened to her?"

"Ah, ma'am, shure 'tis that thafe o' the wurld, her own man, that's worrying the crathur—nivir sober, and divil a bit o' good, and mixed up wid a lot o' murdherin' blaspheming blayguards—'tis prison they'll land in—Jim at the head o' thim. Ah, wisha! but a bad husband's worse than none at all. I'd as soon be a tinker's donkey as the slave av a drunken idle *omadhaun* like Jim Maguire. Ah! me lady, 'tis always the man brings the trouble on wimmin. The blessed Lord knows best why He made thim. Tanglin' the skins it is, and thin givin' thim to us to unravel, and not as much as 'thank ye' for doin' it."

"Is Jim really so bad?" asked Hermia.

"Faix, ma'am, 'twould go hard to find his equal, an 'tis a rope I see for his endin' if he's not after mendin' his ways. But how's yerself, me lady? Shure, 'tis forgettin' me manners I am! Ah! 'tis sore trouble I read on the face of ye; but 'tis trouble brought ye back to Ireland, and that I'm thankful for, and many another av us in the parish, me lady."

“And I’m glad to be back, in spite of the trouble, Molly.”

She sighed heavily, and the little keen eyes gave a quick glance at her face. “Ah, wisha, wisha! and there’s more to follow!” she said, rocking herself to and fro. “Black and bitter days—I see them comin’!”

“You mustn’t prophesy any more evil, Molly,” said Hermia with a faint smile. “It is sufficient when it comes, without anticipating its advent. And now,” she added, “go down to the kitchen and have a good meal; and here’s something to buy yourself tobacco,” as she slipped half a sovereign into the old crone’s hand.

The Red Hen caught the glitter of gold, and paused on the threshold to bless her—including in the voluble benediction all her relatives and belongings. Then she retreated to the kitchen regions to gather and retail gossip such as her soul loved, while Hermia returned to her book.

But the story had lost interest. Her thoughts were far away from the meaning of the words on which her eyes rested. She tossed the volume impatiently aside and went over to the window.

The night was hot and windless, the sky brilliant with star-shine.

Air and sky and earth had all the subtle tempting of beauty, all the magic that Nature lends its summer time. It was a night to stir vague impulses, and waken vague regrets. A night when memory breathes the perfume of past joys to one who has known love’s passion and love’s pain—a night to make one infinitely sad, or infinitely happy.

To Hermia it seemed as if a sudden wave of memory broke across her long enforced calm. Wild thoughts, like a torrent unloosed, swept over her brain, and once more youth and hope and love were hers—the frenzied passion of Juliet—the sorrow of Helöise—the despair of Francesca. Philosophy was engulfed, reason ceased to ply its sophistries. She only felt she was a woman before whom stretched a loveless, barren fate, and in whose heart burned the inextinguishable fires of a love, tragic and unforgotten, and unforgettable.

She lifted her head and gazed out to where the moonlight rested on the crest of the sloping hills, and silvered the ruins of the old abbey. How fair and sweet and calm lay the earth, asleep upon the breast of night. As she gazed, her heart seemed filled with the pent-up sorrow of years. All emotion suddenly culminated in one wild burst of sorrow.

The tears streamed helplessly down her face—a wave of intense misery swept over her.

The one feeling of which she was most keenly conscious was that of physical agony—the sense of some burden too heavy to bear—the utter impossibility of bearing it any longer. Her heart seemed to stand still, then suddenly break into loud and labored beats, every one of which was a pain in itself.

She leant against the window, trembling and weeping, with a momentary sense of that utter aloofness from every other individual sympathy which a great grief alone can bring.

Suddenly she ceased to sob. Her hands fell from her face. She passed swiftly into the adjoining dressing-room, and took a dark cloak from the wardrobe and drew the hood around her face. Then she went downstairs with the same nervous haste, and through the dim-lit drawing-room and out by the open window into the grounds. Traversing them rapidly, she came to a small iron gate leading out to a road. Trees, in their full summer foliage, bordered it on either side. It lay white and silent in the moonlight, sloping gently upwards, and skirting the base of a further hill crowned by the ruins of that old abbey where she had first seen Kitty the Rag.

Hermia climbed the slope and stood at the entrance of the cloisters. The moonlight shone clear and soft, and lit up the carved stonework, the broken arches; and, farther off, the humble graves and rude headstones of the ancient churchyard.

It was a desolate spot, even in its summer beauty, but Hermia cared nothing for its desolation. She had sped there on the wings of impulse, to keep tryst with a dead self and a dead memory.

She was a young woman still—a beautiful woman still—and yet she knew to-night, as she stood in this lonely spot surrounded only by ghosts of her dead youth, that she had tasted all the sweets and all the bitterness of life—had touched the heights of folly, and sunk to the depths of woe.

She sank down on one of the fallen blocks of stone, and, drawing her cloak around her, gave herself up for once to the full and terrible luxury of utter self-abandonment. Scene by scene, step by step, she followed her own girlhood through that sweet and tangled maze which love had glorified into a Promised Land.

Its madness, its briefness, its breath of hot passion, its ter-

rible awakening—all these, in varied images of despair, swept across her vision.

Time had ceased to exist. Life for to-night had reached a standpoint where the immediate moment held all that had any conscious meaning. She thought of no “to-morrow.” The storm-gusts of feeling long crushed by the exigencies of the world, and the demands of existence, swept on and on unchecked.

“This hour is mine,” said Memory . . . and Sorrow gave it up with that sense of tension strained to breaking-point, that is at once the hardest and cruelest test life gives to feeling.

A dark solitary figure, with bowed head bent down on shuddering arms, she sat there alone with grief—the human embodiment of wasted passion and vain regrets.

From time to time a hoarse sob broke from her, but she could not weep easily or freely as some women can.

There are miseries which suffocate us by their own intensity. There are moments when Nature exacts the uttermost farthing of its vengeance on our own long denial of its demands, and such a memory was this in Hermia Ellingsworth’s life. A moment fraught with agony, such as breaks poor human hearts, or makes them only long to “curse God, and die.”

How long or short a time had passed she could not have told, when amidst the sense of her agony and desolation there came to her some consciousness of a touch on her shoulder, a voice, sad and full of wondering compassion, sounding in her ear.

“My poor woman,” it said, “what is your grief? Can you not lay it at the foot of the Cross? Believe me there is peace there, and consolation.”

The voice—full of noble intonations, rich with the music of tender human sympathy—woke in her heart some wandering echo. She drew her cloak more closely round her. The blood in her veins seemed suddenly to grow chill with a terrible dread.

“Who . . . who are you?” she gasped hoarsely.

“I am an unworthy servant in God’s service,” said the voice. “To those who suffer and sorrow here I bear a message of hope. I point out the goal of glory at the end of the path of suffering. I say even as my Master said: ‘Be not afraid . . . neither do I condemn thee . . . go and sin no more.’”

She listened, still bound in that icy chain of wonder and of a dread more terrible still.

What—who was this speaking to her—with the voice of the dead and the authority of the living?

She lifted her head, her hand pushed back the shrouding hood and it fell upon her shoulders. The moon's rays shone full on the marble contour of her face, white and rigid almost as that of death. Her great eyes, in which the tears still stood, gazed up at the noble pitying face bent down to her as to a stranger, suffering and in need.

"My God!" she whispered. "It cannot be you—Eugene!"

He sprang aside as if a shot had struck him. There was horror and wonder in his face, and something like a terrible joy, long starved of hope.

She rose unsteadily, and they stood facing each other under the quiet light of moon and stars in this resting-place of the dead.

Words struggled to the lips of the young priest, but found no channel of utterance.

What could he say? What could any human speech convey in such a moment? All that these past years had held of misery and remorse—of guilty sorrow hidden from the world—of agony and repentance—of pleading to the Great Unknown Power we dimly worship as the Creator of human bliss and woe, all these feelings and emotions and memories rushed over these two agonized hearts.

And in some blind helpless way they knew that Fate had brought them thither, to fill up, as it were, the measure of a grief already full to overflowing.

The woman spoke first.

"It is you—Eugene—really you? You are not dead?"

"I am dead to all that once made life," he cried, the words breaking forth in a hoarse whisper. "And you—you have returned. You have come back here, Hermia?"

"Yes," she said. "Does the choice seem strange? They say a murderer is drawn back by an invisible force to the place of his crime. Perhaps I, in like manner, have been drawn back to the place of my dead youth."

He shuddered as if a cold wind had swept over him.

"Why speak of it?" he said brokenly. "Was it my fault altogether, Hermia?"

"No, I was fully as guilty—if guilt there was. . . . You didn't know all—Eugene."

"*All!*" he said, meeting her eyes with a look of dawning terror. "What more was there to know, Hermia, than discovery and banishment and knowledge of the wrong done?"

"There was—something more," she said. "Something you—you should have thought of, Eugene. What did I know? What could I, a girl of sixteen years, guess or think of consequences—of the future?"

"Hermia!" he cried, and the blood leaped from his frozen heart to his white face, and tingled in every vein, that had striven to deny the rights and obligations of manhood for long and bitter years.

"It . . . died," she said faintly, "and I thought I should follow it. But heaven was not so merciful, Eugene. I lived on . . . I had a hard taskmaster over me—and the lash was not spared. But our secret is still our secret. No one ever knew . . . no one need ever know—now."

"And you—married?"

"I was forced to do so. My father set it as the seal to that bond of silence. I married—and—I lost my husband a year ago."

His eyes flashed as if with sudden relief.

"And you came back here?"

"I cannot rest away from this place, and these people," she said. "They hold my heart and my memory. But you, Eugene—what made you a priest, and why are you also in this place?"

"I am not here, I am staying in Limerick," he said. "But I was sent over to the next parish on a matter of business, and I found I could not return to Limerick till to-morrow. I have just come from the sick bed of a dying man, and I could not resist the longing to visit this spot. I walked across the graveyard yonder and saw a woman sitting there—alone with sorrow. I thought I might comfort her. . . . How could I have guessed *what* woman, of all the many this wide earth holds, would face me once again?"

They stood and gazed at each other in the helpless misery of a hopeless grief. Something sadder than tears in the eyes that asked of each soul its secret, knowing that no veil could hide it in the self-abandonment of such an hour.

It was not love they read, it was not love they feared; it was the havoc of youth's mad passion, and the terrible conse-

quence of youth's mad impulses that looked back from the wreck of past years, and faintly cried its unspeakable misery to each listening heart.

They had not touched hands. They had not, by so much as a step, lessened the distance between them. But all the same the memory of what had been, clasped them in a wild embrace—held them in a passionate bondage.

His eyes released hers first.

Long years of discipline came to his rescue, and all the forces of checked and martyred feeling rose in shocked array at a purely human impulse.

His hands, icy cold as death, clasped themselves under his priest's habit, the nails biting into the flesh in pure unconsciousness. He had passed beyond mere physical pain in this moment.

Backward, step by step, he retraced the joys and sorrows of the past. But the mask of self-effacement was now upon his face. It revealed nothing to her searching, questioning gaze.

"Eugene," she breathed rather than spoke, "has this life brought you peace?"

The death-like pallor of his face changed ever so slightly at her voice.

"I cannot lie to you," he said. "You, my other self—you who taught me the full and perfect meaning of life. No, Hermia . . . I have not found peace. Neither torture, nor self-renunciation, nor fruitless effort has given it me. Sometimes I cheat myself into thinking I have found it, but it is but a dream from which I waken, my heart still full of throbbing misery, of vain remorse."

"The sin was mutual," she said faintly. "Do not blame yourself so harshly, Eugene."

The sudden helpless tears dimmed her eyes. Who, to have seen her now, would have recognized the proud and stately society belle—the cold and self-controlled woman of the world?

"Oh," he entreated, "do not weep . . . it unmans me. Has life not taught you to forget—to console yourself?"

"Life," she said bitterly, "has taught me just as much as your Church has taught you, Eugene."

"Despair!" he cried; "nothing but despair! Has God no mercy? Must all life be poisoned for sake of one error?"

"There are not many men," she said, "who would take such a sin to heart as you have taken it. I have forgiven you

. . . long—long ago. Can that not help you to find peace with Him you serve?"

He bent his head.

"It is the first grain of comfort in all these bitter years," he said. "I never thought to hear your voice speak such words. But none the less is my soul polluted and defiled—none the less do I fear to stand in the face of others and preach to them, knowing the blackness of the sin I carry within me."

"And yet," she said, "I carried mine in the face of the world, and smiled upon it as an innocent woman. Oh! Eugene, why torment yourself? There are thousands of sinners worse than you who hold their heads high and in honor among their fellowmen. Are not even the ranks of the Church filled with the selfish, the vain, the adulterer and the hypocrite?"

"The sins of all the world," he said, "cannot lessen the weight or the responsibility of our own. The fact of a thousand past murders does not afford exemption to the murderer of to-day for his own crime. No, Hermia; speak not to me of comfort or forgetfulness. Have I not another sin to bear from this night forward in the knowledge of the innocent life we martyred?"

"It was better that it should not have lived," she said brokenly. "Surely you see that now, Eugene? Think of me—a mere girl—ruined—forsaken—shamed . . . at the mercy of one so hard and unpitying as my father. Oh! . . . if you only knew how I thanked heaven, when my agony and probation were over, that I had not that most awful burden to bear."

"If I had known!" he almost groaned. "If I had only known!"

"You could have done nothing," she said. "You were banished. . . . Then they told me you never reached America; that the vessel went down with every soul on board. You made no sign all these long years. Even your mother believes you dead."

"My mother! God bless her patient heart! I may perhaps be allowed to comfort her at last. I was ordained in Canada, then sent back here to Limerick. Father Dillon, who knew my story, died three years ago. I belong to the Order of St. Francis. They send me to various places to preach; it is not unlikely I may do so at Knockrea before long. My mother is still here, is she not?"

“ Yes. She travels about as of old from place to place.”

“ When I crossed over to Kingstown,” he went on hurriedly, “ I had for fellow-passenger a child who told me she lived with my mother ; that she had adopted her. She said also that Mr. Marsden was having her educated in England. It seemed to me very strange. Who was the child, Hermia ? and why does your father interest himself in her ? ”

“ That I cannot tell. It has puzzled me often.”

“ It is quite true, then ? ”

“ Yes. The child is somewhat of a mystery ; but she is so beautiful and so clever that I do not wonder at the interest she creates.”

He was silent for a few moments.

“ The hand of Fate has guided me here,” he murmured absently. “ Events are but links in the chain that binds one human destiny to another. This meeting even——”

“ Yes,” she said. “ Who would have thought it possible ? ”

In her own heart she was saying that if she could have lain down on the grass at his feet and died there, she would gladly have done it. What could life mean for her any more save the torture of vain longing ; save a new sense of alienation from every joy or peace that other hearts might know—but never—never hers !

CHAPTER XXV.

A DARK cloud veiled the face of the moon. Its shadow fell upon the two figures standing amongst the straggling grasses—the broken fragments of the ruins. So, too, were their own lives broken and in ruins about them.

The young priest lifted his head and gazed long and sorrowfully at the beautiful, sad face before him. Then suddenly he sank on his knees at her feet, and clasped her hands and bent his cold, damp brow upon them in speechless agony.

She looked down at him, and her lip quivered: “Ah, Eugene!” she cried, “God has punished us enough, seeing that we are for ever parted by your own choice.”

“It was my choice,” he said. “Truly, willingly I gave myself up to God. What was this wretched gift we call life to me? But vainly have I sought peace, or the assurance of forgiveness. The face of heaven seems ever to frown upon me.”

Her weary sigh echoed his own. In her own heart she secretly envied a faith that could assure itself of a heaven, or an ideal forgiveness. “Being your choice,” she went on gently, “you must have counted the cost—you know all it means?”

“I know,” he answered.

“Then,” she said, in the same coldly gentle way, “after to-night the past must be for both of us a sealed book—for ever put away from sight. All has been said that need be said. Between that past and the future life sets this brief meeting ground on which we stand for a little space. But when we leave it, Eugene . . . pray the God in whom you believe that we meet—never again. For a woman’s strength is only as great as her love . . . and I—I have never ceased to love you, Eugene.”

He dropped her hands and staggered to his feet. He felt like a man blind and drunk in the midst of a sudden glory. All the sweetness and sorcery of the past were back with him again—all the empty, lonely years forgotten.

“Oh, Hermia!” he cried breathlessly, “do not look at me with those entreating eyes. The heart of a man still beats in my breast . . . unchilled by the ice of asceticism. Forgetfulness was impossible before . . . what will it be

now? Even our sin has a consecration of its own, since neither time nor absence has turned aside its memory."

"Nor ever will, Eugene," she said, "nor ever will."

He thought to himself that the heaviest penance he might inflict would cheaply purchase the joy of this strange moment—the knowledge of so faithful a love.

He trembled so that he could not stand. Imploringly he stretched out his hands to her, and, as if comprehending his prayer and his weakness, she came to his side, and suffered him to draw her down on the broken stone that had been her seat when he found her.

Soft, filmy clouds still swept across the brilliance of the sky. The hush and stillness of the night was like a spell in that place of human memories, and of human woe.

Side by side they rested in the charmed peace of the summer night, and the wooing wind swept by their tear-wet cheeks, and seemed to bid them take comfort in their love, since neither God nor man could teach them to forget.

She rested against his heart, her frame shaken with heavy weeping, for the tempest of her tears had broken forth at last, and nature, too long outraged of its rights, took vengeance of its debt to the uttermost farthing.

His own eyes were dim with sympathy. All he had suffered and mourned and foregone came back to his memory in one swift flash, as they say the memory of their lives comes to the drowning.

"It is worse than death," he said hoarsely. "Oh, peace—peace, my beloved . . . these sobs rack me. Alas! What ruin is ours! . . . What suffering have I given you to bear!"

With a supreme effort she controlled her grief, and lifted her head from his breast.

"The judgment of heaven is heavy upon us," she said. "Comfort me, if you can, Eugene . . . speak of the hopes to which you cling—the Cross at the foot of which you lay down your burdens."

"Ah, my heart!" he cried passionately, "that I could comfort you! But I am weak and sinful—I cannot teach you what I have not learnt myself. I threw myself into this life hoping to flee from the sins and temptations of the world. I had vowed, Hermia, that no woman should ever be to me anything but a cold impersonal shadow. Love and joy, and all the sweet follies of youth, were over for ever. For a time it

seemed as if I had found peace. I gave up my miserable secret and was assured of pardon. Nothing was too hard for me; no penance too severe, no task too arduous. They told me I had the power of swaying other hearts by the sorrows of my own—of drawing other souls to that Cross to which I cling with all my strength. I seemed to throw off all the responsibilities of self as a grievous burden. In love for God and zeal in the service of the Church I found my only comfort. Then came the mandate for my return here, and I trembled to think of all it would recall. I learnt that you had long left—had married and gone to England; and none recognized me, Hermia. My name—myself, were alike changed. The exercise of my office was confined to another district, as I told you. I have not set foot in my birthplace till to-day.”

She had ceased to weep. Her eyes were gazing at the ruined abbey, and through the ivied spaces where ever and anon the moonlight threw fantastic shadows. She felt she could have listened for ever to the music of that beautiful voice. Its tenderness and sweetness fell on her parched and fevered heart as rain falls on the thirsty ground.

He sighed heavily again. “I wonder,” he said, “that you knew me, Hermia.”

“I knew your voice,” she answered. “If you had not spoken, I might not have recognized you so quickly; but your voice, Eugene! I think if I were dead its sound would call me back to life.”

He shivered as if with sudden cold. He knew he had no right to listen to words like these—to palter with temptation; and yet the old miserable sense of weakness was so strong. Like an unfaithful sentinel, he stood before the citadel of his soul—parleying with, instead of repulsing, the foe.

She had withdrawn herself from his arms when the passion of her sobs was at last exhausted. She knew they must part, but she clung desperately to every moment that still held him by her side.

After to-night life would be over. There was neither plea nor excuse for any future meeting.

Some wild idea crossed her of adopting his faith—of throwing herself, as he had done, into the safety and seclusion of the Church and its sanctuaries. But the strength and activity of her mind shrank back from the perjury such a course of action would entail. She was not of the stuff that makes meek converts and pious sisterhoods; abnegating the rights of

womanhood for an ideal. Her intellect and her heart alike rebelled against the slavish submission that the Romish Church exacts, and on which its supremacy is founded. She marvelled that he could have bent his neck to such a yoke—though she remembered his training, and could picture the force brought to bear upon him at the most critical juncture of his life.

No, plainly this door was closed against her. She must fight down her sorrow by other means than he had selected to conquer his.

Shame and despair swept over her once more. She rose and faced him as one faces one's self-wrought doom—calm with the calmness of ended hope.

"There is no more to say," she cried faintly, "and . . . and it is late—I must go now, Eugene."

He too rose, and gazed long and sadly at her beautiful face—beautiful even after that wild storm of grief.

He had rightly said that under the priest's garb beat still the man's heart. He could have laughed aloud as he thought of the futility of those years of penance and self-denial, that battling with the memories of sin or the tempting of it.

All vain—all useless; straws that had snapped in the fire of this unholy joy—thistledown upon the winds of chance that had made effort a mockery.

"Yes," he sighed rather than said, "we must both go our separate ways. Life has nothing in common for us henceforth, save an endless regret."

"And an endless memory."

For one instant he turned his head as if he could not bear to look upon her face.

"God have mercy upon us both," he murmured. "If we have sinned, in like manner we have suffered. . . . He, knowing all, may pity us and send us peace at last."

"The peace of death, Eugene," she said. "None other is possible, since the same world holds us for ever divided."

"His will be done," said the young priest as he crossed his hands upon his breast and once more bent his uncovered head in momentary reverence. His lips moved in voiceless prayer. The force of habit again reasserted itself, and held him aloof and apart from any personal considerations while his soul soared into self-regulated channels of an assured and assertive faith.

Sadly she watched him, recognizing with keen pain not only the alteration of years but the alteration of his accepted

vocation—the bent form, the worn and sallow cheek, the eye so feverishly bright—these things hurt her more even than that unfamiliar garb which clothed him.

Yet she saw plainly that there was no affectation of religious feeling about him. His temperament was as devotional as his life, and suited to it both by stress of mind and habit. The hardships and restrictions of his order were unfelt by one whose soul only longed for pardon at cost of any sacrifice of life.

As his prayer ceased he lifted his head and looked at her once more.

For ten years he had not seen that beautiful face, and in those years nothing had prepared him for such an hour as this.

From the first trance of joy he had dropped into the gulf of despair. She who had flashed light and life upon his narrow horizon would pass once more from his vision, cloud-wrapped in sorrow and veiled in inaccessibility.

And yet, but a yard apart she stood, love in her mournful eyes, entreaty on her quivering lips.

Must it be that further speech or meeting was forbidden? Was there really danger behind that sweet tempting for some chance word or look—since once again the same land claimed them?

The sudden passionate realization of all that life might have meant for him, and could mean no longer, rent his heart with agony. Words that he felt were madness tried to force themselves through his lips.

Sternly and firmly he fought with them and drove them back. His face became once more a mask, and she saw its cold and stony calm and knew she had had her answer.

She put her hand to her heart as if to still its agony, and with the other drew the shrouding cloak about her form once more.

“Good-bye, Eugene,” she whispered. “Good-bye. I am going home.”

He returned her good-bye and watched her turn away, walking steadily, easily, gracefully, over the dew-wet grass, amidst the broken stones; the moonrays falling like a silver rain upon her dusky garments.

He watched till neither her step nor herself was anything but a memory of the night. Then with one great and bitter cry he fell prone upon the ground, and lay there like the dead whose crumbling dust spoke out with dumb eloquence the vanity of life!

CHAPTER XXVI.

HERMIA never knew how she reached her home. By some sheer blind impulse her feet took her over road and hill and rough, uneven ground, and led her to the entrance whence she had issued in this strange mood of desperate and inexplicable grief.

The windows and doors were closed. She was obliged to ring for admission, obliged to murmur some half-inaudible explanation as she entered, and passed like a sombre shadow into the hall and up the dim-lit stairs.

She heard the man say something, but she took no heed. She was beyond all trifling conventionalities now.

A door was flung open and some one came out, and the lamplight beyond streamed over her anxious face.

"Why, Hermia, my dearest, we were getting so uneasy. I have been waiting for you for two hours, I think."

She made no answer. Hours—days—years! What were they but sounds conveying no sense of time in such a moment as this? She passed into the room. It was just as she had left it. The open window against which she had leant was open still. The light glittered on the hundred and one costly and beautiful things that she had brought here to adorn her own retreat.

The pictures on the wall, the designs of the rugs on the polished floor, the books and work and flowers, all seemed to flash with a raw and vivid identity upon her brain. The very book she had flung aside, impatient of a weak hero and a vicious heroine, lay half open on the table.

And yet it seemed as if years had passed over her head since she had left them all.

Judith Montessor's voice broke wonderingly on her ear at last.

"Hermia," she said, "what is it? What has happened?"

Then some sense of suffocating pain rushed dizzily through vein and pulse, and that impulse to press and crush it down brought her hands to her breast, even as she staggered dizzily toward the couch.

She fell there like a dead thing, while Judith, terrified and perplexed, loosened the cloak from about her shoulders and opened her dress at the throat.

"I am not going to faint," she gasped. "I—I shall be all right—soon."

"Oh! what is it? What has happened?" entreated Judith Montessoro. "Has anything frightened you? Was any one lurking in the grounds?"

A little hysterical sob broke from the white throat where the veins throbbed so painfully. She turned her head aside and Judith saw the tears stream unchecked over her cheek as it lay against the crimson cushions.

She asked no more questions; she saw it was useless. She sprinkled Hermia's brow and chafed her cold hands, and let her lie there weeping as she would until the storm was exhausted, and, passive and trembling, she lifted her eyes to that fond and anxious face so full of pity for her.

"Be sorry for me, Judith," she said. "I am past being sorry for myself."

Then her eyes closed and she lay motionless, save for some shuddering sobs that from time to time heaved her breast.

Judith took the cold hands and held them closely.

"When you are calmer," she said, "you must tell me everything. Surely you can trust me, Hermia! We have reached a point in our friendship when perfect confidence is imperative. You need comfort—you need help. Who should give them to you if not a woman who has sorrowed and suffered as yourself?"

"Sorrowed—yes—but not *sinned*, Judith; not carried a shameful secret in her heart for ten long, hateful years! Not risen and faced the ghost of that sin and seen what it meant for two lives—shipwrecked and lost, and given to despair. Oh, Judith! if God were merciful He would let me die to-night."

"Hush," she said, "hush, this is not yourself speaking, not your *real* self."

"Yes, my *real* self at last. The one you have known was never real, Judith. I don't know what to tell you. I never *meant* to tell you. You will despise me—you will turn from me. Oh! all my life has been one long sham. I have deceived the world—I have deceived the man I called my husband. He never was my husband, Judith, in the true and only sense of the word. The blessings of a priest, the parrot

phrases of a ritual do not *give* a woman to a man unless she gives herself with them, and consecrates their meaning by her love, and that I never did,—that I never can do. I loved one, Judith, and it meant—everything. Can you read my story, now? ”

“Tell me all,” Judith said in a hushed voice. Hermia drew her hands away from that gentle clasp, and covered her face with them.

“I was very young, Judith,” she said faintly. “I had no mother—no one seemed to care about me. I was suffered to run wild—to do what I pleased. I was but sixteen when I found a companion after my own heart—a boy—wild, lawless, beautiful with that strange Spanish beauty one sees in these districts, and the voice of an angel I used to think. He was poor in station, but of good birth, and of family ancient as our own. In some far-off time that family had been united with ours, but had sunk into poverty and contempt. However, at our age and with our undisciplined natures, what cared we for families or pedigrees or anything except the charm and attraction of uninterrupted companionship? Oh! those days of idle wanderings; the long gallops on bare-backed colts, wild and unbroken as ourselves; the careless, unchecked life of careless youth for whom the immediate hour means everything.”

She broke off abruptly and half raised herself from the cushions. A hot flush burned on either cheek. “Have I said enough?” she asked.

“Go on,” said Judith Montessor gently.

“Oh! words are so poor!” she cried passionately. “What can they say of what love meant for us—passionate, ardent, romantic, and innocent? For we were innocent, Judith, and vowed to each other, and sworn to be true, come what might; but whether the priest before whom we plighted our troth was true or false I cannot tell. I only know that when our secret was discovered, I was told that it was one of shame. I only know that I have had to bear its guilty burden all these long and miserable years.”

“Oh, poor child—poor Hermia! Who was it that found out the truth?”

“It was my father,” she said.

“Your father?”

“I—I cannot even now think of that awful time—his rage and fury, and my own terror, without trembling. It was awful, Judith. I must tell it as briefly as possible. He sought

Eugene, and banished him the country in charge of a priest who was was going to America. As for myself—I lived on under his roof until ——”

“My God! Hermia, you do not mean ——”

“Yes. The worst happened that could happen, and I—I had to tell him. There was no one else I dared to confess it to. He bound me to secrecy, and together we went away to a wild and desolate part of the country where no one knew us, and few but peasant folk ever came. He took another name, and the people thought I—I was his wife.”

“Good God! Hermia, this is horrible!”

“He said it was the only way to save my honor. And I—I was too ill and wretched to care for anything. A poor peasant woman attended me. I think my father hoped I would die and that my disgrace might be covered by the grave. But though I was as near to death as a woman well might be, I—I did not die.”

“The child?” asked Judith hoarsely.

“It never lived, they told me. Yet, in the darkness of my sorrowing senses I thought I heard a cry that spoke of life as a birthright. The wonder and the woe of it have rung in my heart ever since that hour. That cry—the soul’s first protest against the burden of visible existence—Judith, no woman who has heard it, ever *quite* forgets.”

“I know,” Judith whispered, and her white face had in it the rapt look of one heaven-born memory. “I have heard it once in my life, Hermia.”

Their hands touched in that momentary sympathy with the fate of a common womanhood, that in some rare moment of life levels queen and beggar alike.

“For long after that,” went on Hermia, “I knew nothing and heeded nothing. We went back to England and I was put to school. I was but a girl you see, Judith, and so ignorant and foolish that I was ashamed of myself often. From the hour I left Knockrea I never returned till that summer, two years ago, when we first met.”

“When you were Lord Ellingsworth’s wife?”

“Yes. Can you imagine now what my marriage meant for me? How, when the chance came, I had no choice?”

“Poor Ellingsworth! Oh! my poor Hermia, what a pitiful tale this is!”

Her own tears were falling on the hands she clasped, but Hermia seemed to have grown suddenly calm.

"That is not all," she said. "I may as well tell you everything, Judith. I said that my father sent Eugene away. After a time—it was soon after I had met Ellingsworth—he told me that the vessel in which he went out to America had been wrecked and that every soul had perished. Judith, I believed that!—I think otherwise I should never have married. I believed it until to-night."

"To-night, Hermia?"

"Yes; for only a few hours ago I learnt that he was alive—though dead to me. He has become a priest, Judith, and some cruel fate has sent him back to Ireland again."

"And you met?"

"We met as two ghosts might meet—risen from the graves of a buried past—and *that*, Judith, is all my story."

Her voice broke once more and the tears filled her eyes as they looked on the tender, pitying face bent down to hers.

Both women were silent for a space. There are moments in life when the poverty of mere words comes home to us—vainly we seek for any speech that could convey what our full hearts hold. Love silenced thus may spend itself in kisses or in sighs, but sorrow shrinks from any outward expression of what is at once too tragic and too sacred for speech. Hermia lay back on the pillows, her face white and rigid, her lips quivering—a sense of utter weariness and yet of relief upon her.

It was good to have broken silence, she felt; good to have cast off its hateful burden even for a few self-deceptive moments.

"I think," she said at last, "that nothing will ever hurt me any more. I seem to have come to the end of pain to-night."

"You will not meet *him* again," urged Judith. "The more hopeless love seems, the greater its danger."

"This is beyond hopelessness," said Hermia. "Death itself could not be more final than the barrier these years have raised."

"If it grow too strong for you, or you took weak for it," thought Judith sadly, "the barrier even of a priest's vocation might be powerless to save you—or him."

"And now," went on Hermia wearily, "all has been said between us. Despise or pity me, Judith; at least you know me for what I am—for what love made me. It seems a fool-

ish thing now to have ruined life, to have given myself all this misery to bear, when I might have been happy as—as other women are.”

“Very few,” said Judith. “None that I have ever met, Hermia; even though they wore their masks as skilfully as you have done.”

“Did I wear it skilfully? I used to fancy it slipped aside sometimes; that the real face looked out from behind. I was afraid of you at first, Judith. You made me reveal more of myself than any other human being had ever seen. I could not lie to you; I had to be honest whether I would or no.”

“I am glad of that,” said Judith softly. “Oh, my dear! if I could only help you to bear this—lighten it ever so little.”

Hermia rose suddenly to a sitting position. Her heavy eyes wandered round the room.

“It seems years ago,” she said, “since I left here. I wonder what strange impulse drew me out! I felt I must go up to the old abbey once more; it was there we used to meet, Judith—he and I—on just such nights as this, and I sat down and drew my cloak around me, and for once I gave sorrow free rein; and then some one touched me on the shoulder and I looked up, and it was he—so pale and grave and sad, and yet so like the Eugene I had known ten years ago. And then—and then——”

“Ah!” said Judith pitifully, “do not tell me more to-night. Your face said enough when I saw it an hour ago.”

Hermia raised her hand to her brow with a weary gesture and pushed the soft hair back from her throbbing temples.

“Do you think love lasts all one’s life?” she said. “Do you think in ten years more I may get over it? Ten years is a long time, Judith, when one is unhappy.”

“You won’t be always unhappy, dearest, believe me. You have faced the worst to-night. God grant you may not meet again, and God send you peace.”

“He has not sent it to Eugene,” she said, “though he has given himself to His service—sacrificed all for the sake of his faith and his remorse.”

“I know! I know!” said Judith brokenly. “Oh! it is terribly hard. What can I say to comfort you?”

“Nothing,” said Hermia wearily. “Nothing! I seem to have touched the border line between life and desolation at last. See how calm I am now, Judith. I feel as if I could never cry again.”

She broke off with a little bitter laugh that jarred painfully on the silence, and on the feelings of the sorrowful listener.

“If I could pray, do you think it would make things easier—simpler for me? Eugene believes in prayer; but I—I cannot. Judith, you are a good woman; you might help me—say something.”

But there was nothing to say, for suddenly the light and life went out of her eyes, and for a time the merciful unconsciousness that is twin-sister to Death closed every sense of feeling and every tortured nerve to all that had meant herself and her misery.

Judith summoned her maid, and together they bore her to her own room and laid her on the bed.

“She has had a shock,” she explained to the terrified girl. “And, following on all this trouble and suspense, it has been too much for her.”

Through the brief hours still left of that terrible night they kept watch beside the stricken woman. But when the death-like trance lapsed into fever and delirium, Judith Montessor knew that Nature had only exacted her due. No woman could have lived out those ten years of Hermia Ellingsworth’s life, and faced such a climax, without paying the penalty that she at last was called upon to pay.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE Red Hen sat by Biddy Maguire's fireside, and, having passed in review all the moral backslidings of her friends and acquaintances, gave it as her opinion that it was a sorry world at best—for rich and poor alike.

"Shure, look at yourself, Biddy woman," she went on. "You're not the same at all, at all; an' lettin' the child be taken away whin she might have been a comfort to your ould age. It's all for granjure she cares, an' whin she's back wid you it'll be a flower-garden she'll be havin' instead of purtaties, an' a piano in the kitchen, I shouldn't wonder, an' evenin' parties. Why you let her go to the quality at all, is what I'm axin' myself."

Biddy said nothing, only looked at the glowing turf with eyes grown very sad and dim in those years of loneliness. She counted them as she counted her beads. For the last five she had not seen Kitty at all. She had not been allowed to come to Ireland for her holidays. But her school days were over at last, and she was to return to Biddy's roof and Biddy's cottage once more.

The news had fallen like a thunderbolt on the astonished ears of the Dalin' Woman. She had never expected that Philip Marsden would send the girl back to her poor home and her former life after giving her an expensive education, and totally unfitting her for a return to such a miserable existence.

It seemed the height of cruelty, but then Philip Marsden had grown strangely cruel and harsh of late years—more merciless, more tyrannical than ever. He was rarely seen; he lived almost entirely within doors, and his house was barred and fenced around with precautions of every sort since that attempt on his life.

An agent managed all the out-door business connected with his property. He himself lived a lonely, almost ascetic life, neither visiting nor entertaining, and seeing no one but his daughter, Dr. Carrick and the vicar of the parish.

Six years had passed since that attempt on his life, but the perpetrator had never been discovered, and he bitterly resented that fact.

He had had no belief in any Irish loyalty to a cause or a friendship that money would not bribe to betrayal, and yet no reward had brought about discovery in this instance.

Jim Maguire, whom he strongly suspected, had been arrested on the charge of treason and sedition and been obliged to cool his heels in the county jail for some months ; but no one was able to support any graver charge against him, and he returned to Knockree none the better in health or temper for his incarceration.

Biddy still worked at her old trade and was none the less popular than of yore. At stated times she received a sum of money, the source of which was an entire mystery to her.

Always on the packet were written the same words : "*From a friend of your son.*"

She treasured up these slips of paper, and took comfort from their regular arrival in the thought that Eugene still lived and had not forgotten her.

She was in far more comfortable circumstances than any one else in the village, and the Red Hen looked enviously at the bright and tidy kitchen, the shining pots and pans, the neat curtain at the little window, the spotless floor and table, the flitches of bacon hanging from the ceiling, and the general air of comfort around.

Hence her sarcastic remarks regarding the flower-garden and the piano.

But Biddy's heart was heavy within her.

She could derive no comfort now from the thought of Kitty's return. She could never be her child again ; never the careless, laughing thing, wild and mischievous as a kitten, the light and life of her home. Education—example—refined surroundings—all these had been hers for the years that in a child's life mean so much. How could she ever content herself again with the humble surroundings, the comparative obscurity of her old position ?

Biddy had tried to obtain an interview with Philip Marsden, but he was obdurate and would not see her.

He had kept his part of the bargain to the letter, but the charity he had shown was more cruel than any neglect.

There were but a few days now intervening between Kitty's arrival, and Biddy Maguire tried to assure herself that she was glad to have her back ; but in her secret heart she knew it was with more dread than delight she looked forward to that re-

union. But she let the Red Hen have her say, and kept her own misgivings to herself.

"You'll be sendin' her out to service, maybe?" continued that amiable seeress. "There's Lady Ellingsworth, now; she's wantin' a maid. Her girl is goin' to marry Pat Maher the baker's son. But maybe it's too fine Kitty will be now to be takin' a situation. I never believed in schoolin' myself, Biddy. It's more harm than good it does to us poor folks. Divil a bit o' larnin' I iver had, but I've contrived to gain an honest livin' for all that."

Biddy looked at her with a faint twinkle of merriment in her eyes. The Red Hen had certainly managed to gain a livelihood after a fashion of her own, but about its honesty or its manner of acquirement there might have been a question.

"Times are changed, Molly," she said, "since you and I was young; and Kitty always had a supayrior way wid her."

"It was lookin' down on the likes o' us an' jeerin' at poverty that was her way," said the Red Hen viciously. "To call it 'supayrior' is a matter av opinion, av coorse."

"That's thrue for you, Molly. It's my opinion. An' we'll not be talkin' any more av Kitty, if ye plaze. Shure it's proud an' glad I'll be to have her back again afther all these years, an' if she's changed—well, I'm not the one to complain av it."

"No! You're a poor-spirited crathur, Biddy Maguire. Ye let her be taken away, an' ye let her be thrown back, an' only a 'thank ye kindly' to thim as plays wid yer feelings. If 'twas me, I'd show thim I wasn't to be traited so!"

"Have you been to Mount Moira lately?" asked Biddy irrelevantly.

"Indade, an' I have! Herself is fine an' well again, though a thrifle paler and thinner than she was whin she first came."

"She has niver been the same since that illness," said Biddy meditatively.

"That's thrue for you, an' there's a mighty quare thing about that same sickness. I've often thought, Biddy, though niver a word has passed my lips—but there's things I *could* say——"

She pursed her lips mysteriously, and Biddy gave a quick glance at the weird little face peering out from the dingy red shawl.

"Ah! shure, Moll Flanagan, 'tis yerself is always the mys-

tarious woman," she said impatiently. "What could you know about her? Didn't the doctor say 'twas the throuble an' the shock of her poor father's accident that upset her?—lavin' alone that the Mount isn't the healthiest place to be livin' in, and Desmond Moira nivir was the sort to throuble his head about a thrifle like drains. What wid the bog, an' the ould graves on the hill—shure, didn't the doctor himself tell me that fayver is just a matter av the way av the wind?"

"'Twas a bad fayver, intirely. Don't I know that for three weeks there nivir was a bit av sinse in her talk, poor sowl? and but for Mrs. Montessor, the darlin' woman that is the good friend to her, sorra a bit would she iver have got over it. Well, I'll be goin' now, Biddy agra. I've had enough o' talk, an' faith 'tis overcome wid the slape I'll be if I stay longer by the fire. I'll come round in a few days to see Kitty an' talk things over wid ye. But it's sarvice ye'll have to make up yer mind for, in spite of her grand education. Good-bye, Biddy woman! The Lord sind you a good slape to-night an' peaceful dreams. It's borne in on me that ye won't have many more av thim."

"Shure, ye're a grand hand at prophesying misfortune, Molly," exclaimed Biddy; "ye might try your tongue at a bit av pleasantness by way av a change."

"I can only say what's tould me," said the Red Hen solemnly.

"But who tells you?"

"Ah! woman dear, don't be axin' me that! There's things couldn't be tould. 'Twould be frightened to death ye'd be if I said what I hear in the wild nights when the wind is *croonaunin'* round the churchyard. The 'good people' are nearer than ye think, for, Biddy——"

"Ah! for the love o' heaven, don't be sayin' such things!" exclaimed Biddy, rising abruptly. "It's not Christian or nathural, and as for throubles, they'll come fast enough whether ye tell me so or not."

But when she was once more alone Biddy felt her heart growing heavier and heavier under a weight of foreboding. The secret she had so long kept haunted her lonely hours more persistently than ever. She had breathed it to no living soul—not even the priest—but then Biddy was not a very good Catholic, and had her own ideas about confession.

Sometimes of late she had felt sorely tempted to confide it

to the good, easy-going old priest who had charge of the parish, but then something seemed to caution her against revealing what was really another person's secret, and the oath that had bound her so long reasserted its power and kept her dumb.

As she looked round her bright little kitchen now, and reflected on the many good gifts fortune had of late bestowed on her, she found herself wondering whether Mr. Marsden had adopted a new method of charity giving—the “letting not his right hand know what the left was bestowing” system. Hard and ungenial and unpopular as most people considered him, Biddy knew that at least he had been very kind to her and to Kitty, and strange as was his present determination to do no more for her, yet, doubtless, he would aid her secretly so as to give no cause for scandal in a place too scandal-loving already.

She took Kitty's last letter from her pocket—the letter written in hot indignation against Philip Marsden's decision.

“I will come back,” it said, “but I shall not stay. I must see him myself and ask his intentions, and then I shall come to a decision about my own life in the future.”

The clear, distinct writing seemed indicative of force and decision of character. Education had, indeed, done much for Kitty the Rag.

But if it came to a battle of wills!—Biddy's hand trembled as she replaced the letter in its envelope. She scented storm and trouble near at hand.

It was a heavy heart she took to her bed with her that night—heavy despite the thought of so soon seeing the child she loved—the child she loved still despite the ingratitude that had been her only reward.

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A tall, graceful slip of a girl came walking up the straggling village street two days later. A girl with flashing eyes and a mutinous handsome face, and about whose whole figure and aspect rebellion seemed to breathe.

Her eyes took in the old, familiar landmarks, noting a change here and there, and conscious above all of the change in herself.

Dressed with severe simplicity, there was something in her

carriage, her easy grace, her perfect self-confidence that bore out the old traditions of race. There was pride in the scornful lip, the flashing eye, and more than pride, there was that curious distinct likeness to another face which is one of Nature's ironies when the branch has no ostensible right to the root.

She came along, her head borne high, giving but brief greeting to many a kindly remark, for all knew that this was Biddy Maguire's Kitty come back once more—the child about whom there had been more talk and mystery than any other in the village.

She came on, and once more in the fading sunset she stood at Biddy's door.

A wave of mingled feelings swept over her as she paused at the old gate. In spite of changes it seemed such a brief while since she had leant over that gate one summer evening in her rags and dirt, and watched the carriage bearing that beautiful woman to the big house, and vowed in her own heart that she too would be a lady and have riches and pleasure and excitement at her own disposal!

What a little progress she had made! Only one step on the road as yet, the road that looked so inviting, so easy to traverse, and yet upon whose very outset she had been checked and rebuffed.

At present she was nursing in her heart a bitter rage against Philip Marsden. What right had he to make her the victim of his caprices? If she had no lawful claim on his protection, she had at least a natural one. Why had he lifted her out of a slough of poverty and obscurity only to cast her back again? He had promised her the future of a fairy tale and then played the part of the wicked enchanter.

Her heart was hot with indignation as she thought of her own credulity and the manner in which it had been fostered.

As she lingered a moment over the threshold of the cottage Biddy came out. She had not known what day or hour to expect her, but the moment she caught sight of the graceful figure and radiant girl's face she knew who it was that stood there.

Her heart stood still with terror, then as suddenly throbbed wildly with joy.

The terror was at the likeness she had discovered, the joy

that her eyes were blessed once more with the sight of her darling.

Granted wishes are sometimes only curses disguised.

Even as her arms held the girl, and her kisses fell on the beautiful proud face, the poor Dalin' Woman felt that never again could she hold part or meaning in the life of the child she had loved so well.

She was nothing to her any longer. As she looked into the eyes that had no answering love—only a petulant impatience—Biddy knew that her last hope died out. Words of welcome lost their eloquence. The Kitty she had known, rescued, toiled for, cared for with all her humble strength, was dead to her for ever !

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"It's no use, Kitty child. I'm shure the masther won't see you. He'll see no one at all these times, saving the doctor or Lady Ellingsworth."

It was Mrs. Geoghagan who was speaking.

Kitty had walked over to the big house the morning after her arrival and demanded an interview with Philip Marsden.

"I intend to see him," she said quietly, as the housekeeper ceased. "So you may as well let me into the library; I have something to say that he must hear."

Mrs. Geoghagan looked perturbed.

"Shure 'tis yourself had always the fine sperrit, Kitty," she said. "But I'd be afraid to make so bould as ye're doin'. He's mighty hard to plaze, an' his temper's none o' the best these times."

"I'm not afraid of himself or his temper," said Kitty. "And he'll not blame you, Mrs. Geoghagan, take my word for it."

She glanced at the clock.

"It's twelve now," she said. "Will Mr. Marsden be down?"

"Down! Yes; these two hours or more. Well, take your own way, Kitty, an' don't be blamin' me if he sends you flyin' out o' the room like a whirlwind, wid the anger an' the rage av him for your intrusion."

Kitty's face paled slightly, but she only drew her head up and walked defiantly from the room.

She knew her way well and went straight to the library. She did not even knock at the door, but turned the handle and entered.

Philip Marsden was seated in a tall leather-backed chair before a table covered with books and papers.

He lifted his head as the door was opened, and his eyes flashed an angry inquiry at the intruder. She closed the door with quiet deliberation, then crossed the room and stood before him.

With one rapid glance she noted the change those five years had made in his appearance. His face had grown sharper and thinner; his hair was quite white; his mouth had taken cruel and cynical lines. His whole face betokened hardness and severity.

For a moment he looked at her with an unrecognizing wonder. Then something in the eyes and mouth struck him as familiar. He leant back in his chair and a heavy frown darkened his brows.

"Why have you come here?" he said.

"Because it is time we had an explanation," she answered. "You wrote to me and said my education was now finished, and that I must make my own way in the world. Do you mean this—is it all you intend to do for me?"

"I am not in the habit of saying things I don't mean," he said coldly; "and you have wasted your time in coming here if it is only to ask what my letter has already stated."

"It is unjust," she cried stormily, "and cruel! What can I do? You bade me go back to Biddy. Do you expect I can live that life again? You know it is impossible!"

"I gave you all I promised," he said steadily, watching every change and expression in her face with merciless eyes. "More than you had any right to expect."

"No!" she said. "Not *more*; not half enough, considering the tie between us."

He laughed scornfully. "There is no tie," he said. "That is a fallacy of your brain."

"You did not deny it—once."

"No! I was amused at your audacity in asserting it. But proof is another thing altogether."

"I may find proof," she said.

He laughed harshly.

"I hardly think you will," he said. "Proof of a non-existing fact will be somewhat difficult to discover."

"Then you deny that you are my father?"

"Most distinctly and decidedly I do."

She grew strangely white and leaned heavily against the table.

"You are a cruel man—a hard man—a man whom no one loves and many hate. Are you not afraid sometimes of—of what may be your end?" she said.

"Not in the least," he said coolly. "The noise of these

raging hyenas without, does not trouble me any more than the noise of the wind in a gale."

She looked at him with a sort of despairing hopelessness. "If you know anything of who I am, or what I am, will you not tell me?" she urged. "That I am not low born I feel assured. It is natural to me to——"

"To love ease and luxury—to let others work for your enjoyment. I am afraid your sex is not exceptional in that weakness."

She flushed proudly.

"No," she said. "It is not that. I don't mind work—I mean to work. But I cannot believe that you acted out of mere caprice; that you let me stay here——"

"Ah!" he said with a grim smile, "I thought we should arrive at that. You rather forced that invitation from me, if you remember; and I, being more good-natured, perhaps, in those days, allowed you to remain. Besides, I was curious to see if you were adaptable—I found you were. Still a caprice is not a precedent, and your holidays have been spent at school or abroad since that little episode. I must say you have done credit to your change of life. You might pass for a lady—which I believe was once the height of your ambition—in any society not too critical, or too refined."

"I am very different to what I was," she said haughtily, "and I shall not go back to it again. I came here to tell you that. If I have no claim on you, as you say, I shall choose my own life. I can go on the stage——"

"Certainly!" he said. "There are a few trifles, of course, to be considered—such as talent, culture, experience—but they are comparatively unimportant. I hear nowadays if a woman has a handsome face and a good figure——"

"And I can sing," she went on angrily. "None of the girls had a voice like mine. The master told me it was fit for grand opera."

"Indeed!" he said, raising his eyebrows superciliously. "That is news, at all events. Ireland has not produced a genuine *prima donna* yet, I believe!"

"I could teach, or write, or be a secretary or companion," she went on. "You could find me some post of that sort, could you not?"

He started ever so slightly. The words struck a chord

of irony in his mind, and set it vibrating to a new fancy which pleased him more than he could express.

"I think," he said slowly, "I might find you a position of that nature, but it would require a little time. Meanwhile, however repugnant to your feelings, you really must content yourself with your former home and former life. My doors are closed to you—for a time, at all events. I have a reputation to keep up, you know, Kitty."

His voice had so strange a ring, his eyes so strange a gleam, that she looked at him with undisguised wonder.

"For a time?" she said questioninglly.

"Yes!" he said. "It is not impossible that you may return here one day. But you will have to fit yourself for the position."

"I—I cannot understand you," she said.

"I do not mean that you should," he answered curtly. "And now I think we have discussed your affairs long enough. I suppose I ought not to say your visit was unwelcome; it was certainly unexpected."

"You surely did not think I should live here, almost at your gates, and not try to see you?"

"I have given up expecting anything from women that is rational," he answered coldly. "But pray do not honor me with any more unceremonious visits. I shall do my best to find you some employment. If you do not like it, there is always the stage, you know, and your voice to fall back upon."

The blood swept hotly to her brow. She had always hated that icy irony of word and voice with which he emphasized any special sarcasm.

"You may jeer as you please," she said. "But I *have* a voice! Some day you will hear and know for yourself."

"I hope not," he answered coldly. "I have been inflicted with too many school-girl sopranos and assisted too often at the murder of art to care for a repetition of the treat. You are all geniuses at sixteen, and amateurs at twenty!"

"Good-bye!" she said abruptly, and walked over to the door. He watched her as he might have watched the paces of a horse, or the points of a picture.

"How rapidly women are modulated," he thought. "A boy would have been a mere cub at her age, and she has actually grace and some sort of distinction in her carriage.

Good-bye!" he added aloud as she reached the door. "I hope you will have a pleasant holiday with your old friends. Contrasts are the salt of life, you know."

She made no answer, only left the room and the house, her face burning, and her heart hot with anger and hurt pride and wounded feelings.

Proudly as she held herself, proudly as she walked through the familiar ways and down the broad white road, she yet shrank from every friendly glance and word.

The rough brogue made the kindly expressions sound barbarous and hateful. The familiar greetings angered instead of pleased her. She hated to think that a few years back she was only as one of these daughters of the soil—ragged, unkempt, ignorant. She resented the fact that the marvelous change in her outward appearance did not impress her old acquaintances. To them she was still only Kitty—Kitty, the village child—Kitty, the nameless waif, at the caprice of charity or interest, possessing no claim or no rights—a weed thrown on the pathway of life to be trampled upon, or take its own chance of growth as chance should decree.

No wonder her heart was bitter within her; no wonder that she rebelled with all her fierce young soul against the tyranny of life.

Instinct—feeling—desires were all at war with her surroundings. More so than ever, since contrast lent its force to past and present experiences.

Biddy saw at a glance that she had been disturbed and vexed, but she asked no questions. She had learnt already that it was useless to do so. With the cruel self-absorption of youth she thought her own interests paramount, and scarcely noted Biddy at all. Her humble efforts at improving the routine of their lives were also ignored. Kitty ate her food in sulky apathy, and more because the healthy appetite of youth demanded sustenance than because she appreciated the improvement in Biddy's culinary arts, or the attempt at setting a table in a manner more befitting the "ways of the quality."

Daily and hourly the Dalin' Woman's good heart was stabbed through and through by the indifference of the girl. In her own humble way she felt that she deserved more than this at her hands, but a certain rough philosophy assured her that a niggard return for past benefits is all that one human

being has any right to expect from another. In any case, it is all they generally get.

Kitty said nothing of her visit to Philip Marsden. She was too proud to acknowledge defeat, and she still nursed a secret hope that he would do something for her. He could not possibly intend that she should return to poverty and obscurity. This was some momentary caprice of his—a probation for her ere he should have made up his mind what was best to be done.

She was naturally indignant at having to return to Biddy's cottage when she had made certain of going to the big house, but even this blow was softened by her own determination to seek for some occupation more congenial at the earliest opportunity, and the knowledge that the whole village must perforce admit she was "quite the lady" at last, as Biddy proudly proclaimed.

But one perpetual affront to her tastes and feelings now was the presence of Jim. He was as dirty, as drunken, as full of sedition and discontent as of yore, and she hated the sight of him. All the more because he perpetually ridiculed her fine lady ways, and persisted in recalling the early years of her life, and her old nickname of "Kitty the Rag."

Nothing enraged her so much, and the fact of her anger only made him torment her more and more as time went on.

A week had passed since that visit to Philip Marsden, and no sign or word had come from him. To Kitty it had been a week of penance and misery. Most of her time she spent out of doors in long rambles with a book for company, for she was wise enough to study unceasingly, knowing how much depended on her proficiency.

One Sunday morning she took it into her head to go off to a chapel in the adjoining parish.

It was the festival of some saint, and a special preacher, whose name had spread into fame for many months past, was expected to deliver the sermon.

The chapel was four miles away, but Kitty cared little for distance.

She arrived in good time, but was astonished to find the little building crammed almost to suffocation. It was with difficulty she got in, and only by careful edging forward and strategic manœuvring did she secure a chair at all.

She listened to the prayers before Mass with comparative indifference. It was little enough she cared for religion at this

time of her life. As the time for the sermon drew near a sort of general excitement prevailed. Late comers were lingering round the door. Every inch of standing room was now occupied, and though doors and windows were all open the heat was intense.

Suddenly, amidst a breathless silence, a priest advanced and mounted the little pulpit. He had no notes in his hand. His face was pale and worn—his eyes large and strangely bright—the brightness of that inner light whose fervor consumes soul and body relentlessly.

They glanced rapidly over the sea of eager faces upraised to his own. Then he bent his head and uttered the brief Latin formula they knew so well, and gave out his text.

Kitty looked at him earnestly. His face awoke some memory she could not quite grasp. His voice completed the chain of association. She knew that it was the same priest she had met on the steamer when she was coming to Kingstown after her first year in England.

CHAPTER XXIX.

KITTY had heard many preachers and many sermons. She felt she had never yet listened to such a preacher as this. It was not only the subject and the treatment of it that were so fascinating, but the beauty of the voice, the eloquence and fervor of a born rhetorician, lent additional charm to a natural gift of oratory.

Here, indeed, was a born "leader of men" and captor of souls. The simplest phrases became powerful as a spell—invested with new meaning, melting obdurate hearts, swaying emotional ones.

When he spoke of the joys of renunciation every one felt that all sacrifice was possible should he direct or desire it. When he spoke of the joys of heaven, the tortures of purgatory, the glories of martyrdom or vanities of life, every heart ached for the release and the joys, the self-abnegation and the crown of thorns to which he pointed the way and the means.

There are speakers whose personal magnetism is their most precious gift, and when to such magnetism is added the charm of voice, the gift of language, and the fervor of the enthusiast, one recognizes the gifts that have made leaders and martyrs alike, and ceases to wonder at enthusiasm.

Entranced and breathless the mass of worshippers listened, tears rolling down their cheeks and sighs bursting from their full hearts. And as he spoke, leaning forward now in his earnestness and self-forgetfulness, the priest suddenly caught sight of the rapt face and glowing eyes of Kitty.

He stopped short—his face whitened to the very lips—the chain of thought snapped as a thread snaps before the flame of a candle. Then with a supreme effort he controlled his emotion and took up his subject once more. But now only the stress and force of habit held the place of enthusiasm, and he concluded with an abruptness almost startling, and left the pulpit and passed into the sacristy, where he sank into a chair, trembling like one in an ague fit.

The ghost of a former life—the flush and radiance of youth and all its blissful memories had flashed back to him from that

young face. In quaking dread he sat, asking himself who it could be—this reflex of another face, this lovely bit of youth and beauty.

In the little looking-glass hanging on the wall of the sacristy he sought sight of himself. His natural energy of character reasserted its controlling force, and he wiped the damp from his brow and tried to compose his ghastly features into their ordinary expressionless repose.

“Surely I grow fanciful,” he said. “A mere chance likeness—a girl’s face to terrify me thus ——”

He gave himself up to prayer until the time came for him to assist at the Mass. Resolutely he kept his eyes away from the congregation in brief intervals that compelled him to face them; but he need not have feared, for Kitty had slipped away at the conclusion of the service, and was walking slowly back under the hot sunshine, her heart full and her mind troubled and uneasy.

Her imagination had been strongly affected by that sermon. Had she been of softer moral fibre the impression would have been deeper and perhaps more painful, but hard and rebellious as was her nature it had for once acknowledged the power of goodness in another.

There was no doubt that Father Considine believed all he said. No one could have looked at that glorified spiritual face and doubted that for him at least God and Christ and Heaven were vivid realities.

“But then, what can he know of life?” she thought resentfully, with that ignorance and presumption of mere youth, whose sorrows, to itself, are so all-important.

Kitty, in her own little world, seemed to herself the central figure. The insidious whispers of vanity and ambition had deafened her to other voices wiser or more truthful. Yet on this glorious summer day her reluctant eyes had beheld a vision that made all else seem poor and of no account. She had seen a mortal man in fellowship with angels, bearing on his brow the stamp of the noblest purity; bowing the hearts of all who gazed at, and all who heard, him in reverence less enforced by rights of office than by individual feeling.

The power of Goodness had taken form and shape for the wayward waif. She might ignore—she could never again deny it.

Restless and disturbed, the smart of unshed tears in her eyes, and self-reproach gnawing at her heart, she took her way homeward. Perhaps for a little space Kitty rose to a height

that she never suspected, and seeing something of her own thanklessness and vanity grew humble and penitent. Her better nature struggled against the ill weeds that she had suffered to grow unchecked, and she recognized one influence under which she might have become nobler, better, braver.

She went home so gentle and subdued that Biddy marvelled, and in her tender, humble way treasured up every crumb of comfort the change cast to her hungry heart. When evening came Kitty asked her to go for a walk, and, in spite of fatigue and a growing weakness of which she was becoming conscious, Biddy donned her best bonnet and shawl and went proudly forth by her darling's side.

Kitty directed their steps to the ruined abbey, and the long and toilful ascent tired Biddy severely, but martyrdom would have been welcome to her for the sake of the gentle words and altered manner of Kitty. All previous slights and rudeness were forgotten. She felt she would have gladly died then and there in that moment of reawakened hope, amidst that tender atmosphere of graciousness. They seated themselves in Kitty's old favorite nook, and she threw herself down on the grass and leant her head against Biddy's knees.

"Biddy," she said, "are you ever going to tell me who I am? It is no use pretending I come of poor and common folk. I can *feel* I don't. I want a different life, and I seem to have always wanted it, even when I was a ragged, ignorant child. Biddy, tell me for the love of Heaven who were my parents!"

The lovely eyes looked up at the Dalin' Woman's face, passionate—beseeching—wringing her very soul with their entreaty.

The shadow of intense suffering swept over Biddy's face. Her lips trembled.

"Ah! Kitty darling," she said faintly, "it's no use yer axin' me that. I took an oath onst and it would be my death to break it. Neither to man, woman, nor praste could I ivir tell the story until I'm laid on me dying bed. Maybe thin I may spake out and relayve me own sowl—for indade, acushla, it's been a weary burden to me these many years."

An impatient frown darkened Kitty's brow.

"I have a right to know," she said. "I *will* know. Somehow—in some way I shall find it out, and then——"

"Don't say rash words, darlin'," entreated Biddy. "Thim as curse are as often as not thim on whom the curse falls."

"I shall not curse them," said Kitty proudly. "But I shall

hate them, father and mother both. What right had they to give me life and then forsake me? Why, the very beasts and birds are more compassionate to their young!"

"Wisha, wisha, child! Ye don't know the rights of things to be spakin' sich wicked words! Supposin' they couldn't help it—supposin' they was parted and never knew ——"

"My mother must have known," said Kitty rebelliously, "and she deserted me. I tell you, Biddy, if ever we meet—if ever I know who she was—I shall deal her back what she has given me to bear. The measure of her sin shall be the measure of my hate!"

"Hush, child," cried Biddy warningly. "There's steps beyant. Some one is there and heard ye."

Kitty rose to her feet and glanced through the broken arches of the cloisters. Some one was there. A woman standing motionless, her eyes fixed on the reddened glory of the sun, her face bathed in the splendor of its golden rays.

As the girl moved she looked at her quietly, unrecognizingly. But Kitty knew it was the beautiful daughter of Philip Marsden.

A hot flush of shame suffused her cheek. She stood perfectly motionless, her eyes cast down. Something of the wonder and admiration she had felt before for the "beautiful lady" swept over her impulsive heart, and she felt a thrill of shame at the thought of the words she had just uttered. But pride held her dumb, and the stubborn knees bent in no curtsy now.

Lady Ellingsworth still stood silent, but something in the embarrassment of the girl appealed to her at last, and she made a step forward.

"Were you looking at the sunset?" she asked. "It is very beautiful from here."

Kitty lifted her eyes. "You have forgotten me, I suppose, my lady?" she said.

"Forgotten you? Have I ever seen you before?"

"It was many years ago, here, in this very same place. Do you remember a child to whom you talked, and to whom you gave some good advice?"

Lady Ellingsworth's thoughts strayed into a labyrinth of conjecture. The girl aroused many vague memories, and they were not altogether pleasant.

She looked at the tall, supple figure, the lovely face, then her eyes wandered further to where Biddy sat, a silent figure, motionless as her seat. She knew her, at all events.

"Why," she exclaimed, "you must be Kitty Maguire."

"Yes," said the girl simply, "I am called that now."

Lady Ellingsworth advanced eagerly.

"How strange," she said. "I was coming to see you to-morrow, in compliance with a wish of my father's. He has written asking me if I could give you any sort of employment for a time. I thought I would come and see you and ask what you could do. My maid ——"

Kitty's eyes flashed scornfully. "No, thank you, my lady," she said proudly. "I will be no one's maid or servant. I am capable of better things than that!"

"Kitty child, Kitty!" murmured Biddy protestingly.

"Then—what is it you want?" inquired Lady Ellingsworth in some surprise. "I understood ——"

"Mr. Marsden knows that I have plenty of accomplishments," said Kitty, speaking clearly and slowly and with as perfect an English accent as Hermia herself. "I write a good hand. I can play and sing. I know French and Italian. I want to go somewhere where such things are of use."

"A companionship or secretaryship would suit you," said Hermia slowly. "Well—of late I have found my correspondence somewhat more than I can manage, and I am passionately fond of music. My own voice has never been the same since a severe illness I had some years ago. Would you care to come to me and write my letters, and amuse one in the long, lonely evenings?"

Kitty's face flushed gladly. "Indeed I would," she said. "I long to be independent; at least this will serve as a beginning."

She expressed no gratitude, no fear of her own incompetence. Hermia thought she was certainly the most self-confident young person she had ever come across.

She looked at her keenly and critically. Her beauty was undeniable, and the new air of distinction and dignity which she had acquired sat quite naturally upon her.

There is an adaptability about the Irish that readily suits itself to any situation, however unusual; but, in the case of Kitty, hereditary instincts had assisted this adaptability.

It was no effort to her to appear what she now seemed, and Hermia was quick to recognize the fact.

It in no way allayed her suspicions; indeed, it increased them, and made her father's interest in the girl easily explicable.

He had been somewhat urgent in his appeal to her to befriend Kitty, and yet throughout the appeal it had seemed to her as if a note of command was sounding.

This sudden *rencontre*, while it had taken her by surprise, yet served a certain purpose that neither had anticipated.

In spite of an undercurrent of antagonism they felt strangely attracted toward each other. The elder woman unbent more graciously than the younger. To her it was less of an effort. The girl's rare beauty had a certain pathos—set as it was in such uncongenial surroundings—it appealed as strongly as any claim to one who knew the snares and pitfalls of the world.

So she lingered on, talking chiefly to Biddy, but listening and watching Kitty with intense interest.

She saw that the girl would develop into yet greater beauty, and something about her awoke a recollection of her own long past youth, and made her pitiful of even the pride that repelled her own kindness. For she recognized the pride even more than the vanity, and where once she would have been contemptuous she was now compassionate.

The fires of a great sorrow had purged much of her own pride—shown her much of her own egotism. She was actuated as much by a genuine compassion as by a desire to please her father in this matter of receiving the girl under her own roof.

Besides, she knew that a hawk once unfettered will come back no more, and Kitty's wings had already been spread to the winds of freedom. Better they should have their fill of the liberty that she called independence.

CHAPTER XXX.

"It is a dangerous experiment," said Judith Montessor.

"I don't see the danger," answered Hermia. "There is no doubt about her abilities or her beauty, and I feel it would be unkind to leave her to the tender mercies of strangers. My father says she will go on the stage if nothing else intervenes; and we know, Judith, what that means for a girl, young, innocent and as lovely as this girl is."

"But why does not your father get her some situation or employment, since he has made himself responsible for her education?"

"That is just what he has done," said Hermia. "He offered her services to me."

"I should like to see her again," said Mrs. Montessor thoughtfully. "It is many years since she was here. Has she been all that time at school?"

"Yes, I believe so. Her education has certainly been excellent. I daresay I shall find her very useful, and even if I don't, and we don't suit one another, there will be no harm done. I can easily find her something else. I have not quite lost touch with all my former friends and acquaintances."

"Is she the sort of girl to adapt herself to a dependent position—tend the lap-dog, mind the parrot, hold skeins of wool, and read out the *Times* and the *Nineteenth Century* to old ladies?"

Hermia smiled. "Well, no," she said; "I hardly think she is, but you will soon be able to judge for yourself—she is coming here to-morrow."

"Do you intend that she should dine with you—spend her evenings with you?"

"When I am alone—yes. I cannot do things by halves, Judith."

"The people here will think it rather strange; don't you think so?"

"I have never regulated my actions by the opinions of other people if they seemed right to myself."

"How proud you are, dearest."

"Ah, no, Judith—I don't call *that* pride. It is only a conviction of one's own stability of mind. I laid my pride down once and for all—that night when I told you my story and showed you myself."

"You are not sorry, Hermia, that you told me?"

"No; I think it was a relief. You have a noble nature, Judith; you gave not only sympathy, but what is harder—comprehension."

"The wound is healing, is it not, Hermia? We have not spoken of it for long."

"Yes; I think it is healing, Judith. The pain is still there, but it is less severe and less hopeless."

"Hermia, I think I ought to tell you something. Since we have broached the subject once again I find it easier. Hermia, have you heard of the wonderful preaching of a certain Father Considine who from time to time is sent to different parishes around? I think it is in hopes of stirring the people into a new phase of religious feeling. In any case, his success and his power are undeniable. Well, I went to hear him a short time ago, and I think—I am almost sure, Hermia——"

"That he is Eugene Maguire? I know it," she said sadly and yet proudly. "He took a different name on entering the order. Yes, Judith, I have heard of him, and heard him also."

"You, Hermia! You never told me."

"We had agreed it was best not to speak of him too often. And I found it hard to express what his preaching meant to me, or how strange it seemed to sit there—aloof, unknown—and listen to that beautiful voice, and thrill and tremble and grow faint beneath the spell of that almost supernatural eloquence."

"You are right. His preaching is the most marvelous I ever listened to. He seems to have the power of touching the very core of sorrow—of going straight to the heart. He will be of importance to his order some day—of too great importance to be left unnoticed and unhonored in a country parish."

Hermia's cheek paled. What woman is there who has not said in her heart: "Though our lives be apart, let him I love be within sight of my eyes, or reach of my hand"? For woman palters with temptation more often and more fatally than man, and the snares of Satan are for ever set for her with the bait of a pretended separation.

And so Judith Montessor's words struck a chord of unacknowledged terror in her listener's heart,

If he were sent away to another land, if no longer the same air and sunlight held for both the sweet meaning of proximity—fanning the cheek and lighting the path of each—even though those paths lay far apart!

“Have you heard such a rumor?” she asked hurriedly.

Judith Montessor noted the paling cheek, and the sudden terror of the questioning glance.

“No,” she said, “I have not heard it. I only imagined it was probable. His Church is not like ours. It never wastes its useful servants. It is quick to recognize the value of such preachers as Father Considine. That gift of swaying the multitude is none too common. It has its advantages as well as its dangers.”

“He is wonderful,” said Hermia.

“He makes one believe in Heaven-ordained apostles. He could make one believe in almost anything—for a time,” said Judith Montessor. “Poor Mr. Kilmayne and Father Reilly have a dangerous rival. Unfortunately, however, enthusiasm is a feeling that has no deep root. With all men’s hope of God in Heaven, few seem to care to walk with Him on earth.”

There was silence for some moments. Then Judith Montessor spoke again.

“I don’t know if I ought to say it, Hermia,” she began hesitatingly; “but my impression was that, while having the dangerous power of making others believe what he said, he did not believe in it himself.”

Hermia started slightly. Some feeling of loyalty prevented her acknowledging that Judith was not alone in that impression. The fervor and passion of the so-called Father Considine had seemed to her also more like the outcome of long-born anguish, fighting its way to hope and eternity, than the calm assurance of a soul at rest and satisfied with its foundation of faith.

“Enthusiasts often deceive themselves,” continued Judith Montessor. “The fervor of zeal on the one hand is as dangerous as morbid self-condemnation on the other. There is some gnawing torture of the soul at work in Father Considine, Hermia. His brilliant popularity is a secret known only to himself.”

“How can you read him so confidently?” asked Hermia.

“Because I have been a student of human nature for many years, and also because I have been behind the scenes of his life as well as before the curtain. He is a desperately unhappy

man, Hermia, struggling with an endless remorse. Neither power, nor honors, nor the praise and reverence of his fellow-men can give him any real comfort."

"And how lightly other men sin and regret," sighed Hermia.

"They are of stronger texture of mind. In looking at and listening to this man, it struck me that his remorse for past sin was only a degree less than his dread of sinning again."

"Judith!"

"Ah! my dearest, don't look so shocked. Are we not all weak? and has not love sapped the strength of the strongest before now? Mind you, I am not asserting that this man would willingly palter with temptation, only that he is conscious it exists. It is in the air he breathes—it etherealizes his communications with another world. It makes him poet and saint in one, and the combination is singularly attractive."

"We have never met or spoken since—that night," said Hermia sadly.

"I believe it. But you go to hear him preach, and he is aware of the fact."

She grew crimson.

"How do you know? I am sure he has never seen me."

"I happened to be there once, and I knew he was as conscious of your presence as if he were gazing on your face. I thought that night, Hermia, that it would be wiser if you were to leave this place or—or ask him to do so. While he was at Limerick he was comparatively at a safe distance, but now that he is traveling in this district——"

"You forget," she interrupted, "that he is a priest!"

"Oh, my dear, was not Abelard a priest, and is not a priest a man? And have you read the history of cardinals and bishops for nothing? Whence springs the goodly crop of nephews and nieces that are proverbial relatives of the Italian Monsignori? An enforced morality is the weakest chain that a creed can forge to bind its order together; and like all chains, moral or religious, it is only as strong as its weakest link."

"Judith, you are speaking as if you thought ——"

"I am speaking only as your friend, Hermia—as a woman who has seen so much sin and misery spring from what is called love that she dreads its very shadow. I know you are very proud and very cold, but could you be proud enough and cold enough to tread on a man's bleeding heart, Hermia? Could you be deaf alike to his passion and his prayers?"

“If they were—sin.”

“Sin is only a word that the fire of passion consumes like tow. When two lives choose to become a law to one another they don’t stop to ask where sin ends—or begins.”

Hermia had grown deadly pale. “You foresee a danger where none exists,” she said. “We have parted for ever on this side the grave.”

“And he is to you only the mouthpiece of Heaven. He can bear your soul where once he bore your heart?”

“He seems to me a saint in human form. Wherever he goes good attends him—blessings follow him. It is impossible to listen to him and not believe that God and Heaven *do* exist, that our wider modern day philosophy is a poor stay in the hour of need.”

Judith Montessor looked at her long and silently. In her heart she was saying, “Ah, poor Hermia, has my warning come too late?”

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The discussion had taken place after dinner in Hermia’s favorite morning room.

A long silence followed that last remark. The two women drank their coffee, and reflected on the meaning of impersonal religious fervor according to the bent of their own minds.

No one knew better than Judith Montessor when to close an argument, or cease the discussion of a point. She loved Hermia as a sister, she admired her as few women admire their own sex, but she saw the weak points in her character with eyes clear-sighted and half fearful. To have evaded shipwreck once is not to be exempt from its recurrence.

The change of years was a very marked change, but even the searing hand of sorrow had not marred Hermia’s noble beauty. It had only lent a rarer charm to her face—softened its pride, subdued its rich coloring, made a picture of a statue, as it were, and turned the channels of feeling and of passion into the tranquil waters of thought.

She had read much and studied much. Having no prejudices, her range of subjects had been varied and wide. In Judith Montessor she had a companion after her own heart—one to whom the surface of life presented no attraction in comparison with the mystery of its depths.

The natural result however of this intellectual ardor was to lessen her interest in the common phases of life around her.

She grew impatient of the pettiness and restrictions of social obligations, and offended many of her country neighbors by her neglect or refusal of invitations, and her own paucity of entertainments.

She still went among the poor and still maintained her staff of pensioners, but even these duties were undertaken in a critical and investigating mood. She had a strong desire to get at the root of Irish discontent. Surely the people of the country had possibilities within them that only needed a few wiser heads and skilful hands to direct into useful channels. With all her prejudice against her father's sternness she could not but acknowledge that he had made great improvements. Knockrea was one of the finest and best managed properties in the county, and in comparison Mount Moira made but a poor show.

The absence of the rightful owner served as an excuse for any amount of negligence. Some of the outlying farms were a disgrace, and in vain Hermia rode over to rebuke by word, or shame them by pointing to the example of others.

So arduous and uncomfortable had her duties become that at last she had written to Desmond Moira entreating him to appoint an agent to manage these refractory people. She herself had set going a scheme of cottage industries for the women—with the aid of Judith Montessor. She found them tractable and industrious enough, but the farmers and laborers seemed hopeless. No innovation would they permit. No advice would they follow. No example would they acknowledge to be a good one.

It was entering into these schemes that had led Lady Ellingsworth into an amount of correspondence, discussions, and committee meetings which had rendered the employment of a secretary imperative. After her friend had left her that night she occupied herself in sorting and arranging papers and letters, so as to be able to give the necessary instructions to Kitty when she should assume her duties next day. While doing so she observed an unopened letter lying on the top of her bureau. It must have come by the last post and been placed there to attract her notice.

She saw the postmark was Italian and the writing that of Desmond Moira. He acknowledged her last check for rent and then dashed haphazard into the subject of her letter and the troubles afforded by refractory tenants.

"I am sending my nephew over to look into matters," he

went on. "He was educated for the Bar and has been knocking about Dublin and London for the last four or five years. He's smart and clever, and has written to me saying he'd like an agency better than waiting for briefs. I told him he might see what he could do for Moira, and if that didn't suit I'd speak to Lord Dunsane about him. So you may expect the boy (he's a fine fellow, and a Moira every inch of him) in a week or so. He will call on you at once in order to learn your opinion of the tenants, in whom you've taken far more interest than they're worth, and from whom you need expect (if you'll pardon my frankness) no more thanks than I've ever got, or ever look for."

CHAPTER XXXI.

HERMIA replaced the letter in its envelope with a sigh of relief.

If she had any one to work with—a strong directing power amenable to the softer side of the question—she felt that a great deal might yet be done for Mount Moira. It had all the possibilities of Knockrea, added to an older name, and a mansion of almost historical reputation.

Its beauty and its age had appealed irresistibly to her, and she felt a keener interest in it than ever since she had become its tenant.

Above all things she dreaded its coming to the hammer, passing away from the family and falling into the clutches of some rich parvenu, who had made his money in soap or starch, or some other useful and necessary commodity that had impressed the public by advertisement, or deluded them by the arts of adulteration. “Castles falling and dunghills rising” was a favorite saying of the people, and the country round gave ample justification for the aphorism.

Most of the old families had either lapsed into hopeless poverty or sold their estates for whatever they would fetch and left the country. Any amelioration of poverty or improvement in the agricultural districts brought about by this change was regarded only with disfavor and suspicion.

In Ireland the proverb of “the King can do wrong” found its antitype in the feeling that “the English can do no right.”

It was almost as hopeless to struggle against the prejudice of race as the prejudice of centuries, and Lady Ellingsworth was far from being alone in giving way to that feeling after years of struggling against it.

But a sense of new hopefulness came to her with the prospect of young Moira’s arrival; and she put the letter safely away and went to rest, feeling more nearly content than she had done for long.

The sense of responsibility had weighed heavily upon her of late. It was pleasant to think some one else would share it for the future.

She had written to her father to say that she would receive Kitty under her roof, but he had taken no notice of the communication. About noon next day the girl arrived.

Hermia received her in the morning room, and chatted graciously to her for some time before explaining the nature of her work and the hours that would have to be devoted to it.

"You will be quite free in the afternoons," she said, "and can practice or study or do anything you please. I have very few visitors, and when I am alone should like you to dine with me. In the evenings, if my friend, Mrs. Montessor, is not here, you will also be at liberty to work, or read, or sing to me. You are not to neglect any of your accomplishments, especially as you wish to make your own way in the world."

Kitty listened silently. The ease with which she had accomplished this first step toward independence, in some degree lessened her gratitude toward the bestower of it. There was no doubt that Mr. Marsden had some strong interest in her, let him deny it as he pleased, and that Lady Ellingsworth knew of it and shared it she was equally convinced.

However, she said nothing to betray those suspicions, and assented quietly to all Lady Ellingsworth's suggestions and orders. The time for rebellion was not yet, but doubtless it would come.

A servant showed her to her room, and she was delighted with its comfort and simplicity.

Everything was sweet and fresh and dainty. A writing-table stood in the window, and a shelf for books hung against the wall. The hangings and curtains were of chintz, the furniture of maple wood. Her box had arrived and she unpacked its contents and put them away and filled the shelf with her school books and prizes.

Then she looked out from the window at the now well-kept garden and the belt of woods in the distance, at the hills bathed in sunshine, the picturesque pile of the ruined abbey, the silver glow of the winding river.

It was all so beautiful and peaceful that her heart throbbed with delight. A new house, a new life, what did they not promise?

She felt as if she had cast the shackles of the old from off her limbs and that nothing would induce her to take them up again. When she turned from the window and looked at herself in the mirror a thrill of gratified pride ran through her veins.

She smoothed her burnished hair and brushed the dust from her simple black gown. It fitted her to perfection, and its very plainness only seemed to show up her lovely coloring and her perfect skin. Then she went downstairs and found that Lady Ellingsworth had left rough drafts of some half-dozen letters for her to write, a task which she soon accomplished.

She wrote a bold, firm hand, easy to read if possessed of no special grace ; but Lady Ellingsworth pronounced herself quite satisfied when she returned and looked over the correspondence awaiting her signature.

Then luncheon was announced, and they went into the dining-room. None of Lady Ellingsworth's servants knew Kitty, or had heard her history. The girl showed not the least embarrassment before them, or seemed in any degree put out by the change from Biddy's humble table to this costly and well-appointed one.

Hermia watched her closely and with increasing wonder. Where had she learned her manners, her perfect ease and composure ? No fault could be found with her so far, and she was half pleased and half annoyed that such was the case. It would be no easy matter to treat this self-possessed and queenly young person as a mere paid dependant. She found herself wondering what Judith Montessor would think. She was coming to dinner that evening and would doubtless give her opinion.

After luncheon Lady Ellingsworth went for a drive, and Kitty amused herself by practising her singing in the great unoccupied drawing-room.

She was astonished at the difference in her voice when she threw it out into this vast space. Its richness and volume of tone almost startled her. It had never sounded like this in the little close schoolroom or on the pupils' platform at breaking-up time.

Just as she was revelling in the execution of some particularly brilliant passages, the door opened, and the footman announced a visitor.

The girl started to her feet and saw a young man standing by the door.

He looked at her with such astonishment that she half laughed.

" Was that *you* singing ? " he exclaimed. " By Jove ! "

"Yes," she said. "I am afraid I was making a great deal of noise. I was practising."

"Practising!" he said. "I never heard such singing! It was marvelous. What on earth do you call your voice?"

"It is a contralto—only I have been told it is of unusual compass," said Kitty, coloring with embarrassment beneath the admiration of his glance, and wondering who he was.

It seemed to occur to him that some account of himself was needful.

"I called to see Lady Ellingsworth," he said genially. "I am Laurence Moria, the nephew of the owner of Mount Moira, you know. You, I suppose, are Lady Ellingsworth's daughter."

"Oh, no," she said with sudden hauteur; "I am only Lady Ellingsworth's companion."

"By Jove!" he said again and pulled his fair moustache awkwardly, and looked at her and then at his boots and wondered what the deuce he could say next. For this young lady looked far too haughty and dignified for mere friendliness, and she had never asked him to sit down.

In real truth Kitty was somewhat embarrassed. She had never entertained a visitor before and was wondering what she ought to do.

"You wished to see Lady Ellingsworth, I suppose?" she said. "She is out driving, but she said she would be in at five o'clock. Can you wait?"

"Certainly," he answered, lessening the distance between them and approaching the windows which looked out on a smooth well-kept lawn. "How this place has been improved," he said presently. "When last I was here it was in a most ramshackle condition. Lady Ellingsworth has done wonders."

"I have only come here to-day for the first time," said Kitty. "But she told me she had tried to improve it a little."

"A little! Why, she must have spent a fortune on it—and for other people's benefit. What singular taste!"

Then he turned to the girl with his pleasant smile.

"Do you know," he said, "why I am here?"

"Indeed I do not," answered Kitty, moving away to the music stool again. "I believed it was to see Lady Ellingsworth. Did you not say so?"

"*Imprimis*—yes. But chiefly to help Lady Ellingsworth. The tenants are getting a little too much for her. I should

think they would be too much for any one from what I remember of them, and so I have been sent to keep them in order."

She looked at him critically.

"Do you think you will be able to do that?" she asked.

"Well, that's not an easy question to answer. But I mean to have a try. As I am not quite a stranger I may have a better chance than the regular professional agent."

She remained silent. She had never spoken to a young man of Laurence Moira's position yet, and she felt a difficulty in carrying on a conversation.

He on his part was studying her intently and critically, as was a habit of his. She was very young, he thought, to be obliged to work for herself—strangely young to take such a post as she had mentioned.

About her beauty there was no question, but Laurence Moira had seen so many beautiful Irish girls that he had lost some of the inflammability of young manhood.

The silence grew almost uncomfortable at last. "Perhaps," he suggested, "you would not mind singing to me again? It is not often one has the chance of hearing such a voice."

"Certainly, if you wish," she said, turning over a pile of songs on the grand piano. "But I don't really sing well; I know I have the voice, but not the training, style—what it is that makes the difference between singing, and a singer."

"I am quite content," he said, "with the singing."

She struck a few chords. Her playing was far below her vocal abilities and suffered by comparison.

"Do you know this?" she asked, and gave out the melody of "Shule Agra."

Know it! He had known it from his cradle. But what spell did this girl contrive to throw around such commonplace words and music? What brought the tears to his eyes as the rich full notes throbbed in the silence of the room?

Kitty's voice was almost phenomenal. She herself was not half aware of its wonder or its power. As an organ to the touch of the skilled player, so those glorious notes rose and fell, trembled or sank into silence at the merest effort of the singer. There was no break in the compass, every note rang full and true from the lowest to the highest. From the low E to the B in alt. it ranged, and its use seemed as easy as speech. Young Moira grew perfectly wild with enthusiasm.

"The idea," he said, "of any one with a voice like that going out as a companion. Why, you are a born artist! If you studied two years in Italy you would come out as a star on the concert platform, unless you preferred grand opera. Don't think I'm talking wildly. I've heard hosts of singers—the best of our day, some of them—but I've never heard such a voice as yours. What were your teachers about that they did not tell you?"

"I believe they didn't care much about it," she said. "It was not ladylike singing, you see—not the sort one hears from a schoolgirl. That was the only standard required of us."

"But now," he said eagerly—"now that you have left school—surely you will study music professionally. What does Lady Ellingsworth say? Surely she would not keep you in your present position if she heard your voice."

"She has not heard it," said Kitty. "But perhaps she would not share your opinion even if she did."

"She couldn't help it," he answered. "No one could."

"But to go to Italy," she said, "and to study as you say, would cost a great deal of money, and I am very poor—and I have no claim on any one. It is not possible."

"There are plenty of people," he said, "who would advance the money for your musical education if once they heard your voice. It would be a very safe investment even for an *impresario*."

Her eyes flashed with hope. "Oh!" she said, "if it *could* be—if it were only possible!"

"We must try what we can do," he said heartily. "If I were only a rich man I would advance the money directly—as a mere matter of speculation. I am as sure of your success as if I heard you enthralling all London!"

She smiled. "But you forget no principal parts in opera are written for a contralto, and two stars cannot shine in the little firmament of the stage at the same moment."

"Well, there is always the concert room! There, at least, you have the firmament to yourself."

"Yes, I should like that. And it would not be such hard work. But then, neither would it bring the fame!"

"You must not be too ambitious," he said. "Ah! here is a carriage coming up the drive. Is that Lady Ellingsworth?"

Kitty rose and went over to the window. "Yes," she said; then added hurriedly, "Please do not say anything to

her about my voice. I want to have an unprejudiced opinion."

"Mine was that," he said smiling.

"I express myself badly. I mean—her opinion on first hearing me—without——"

"Without praise in advance? I understand; I will say nothing, I promise you."

CHAPTER XXXII.

LADY ELLINGSWORTH was surprised to find that young Moira had arrived already. She greeted him very cordially, and ordered tea to be brought in, and asked Kitty to pour it out for them.

"Where are you going to stay, Mr. Moira?" she said as he took his cup from the girl's hand. "Your uncle said nothing about that, and I was going to write to ask you to put up here for the present. There is no house I know of on the estate that would be at all suitable."

"Oh, I am not particular," he said genially; "and I am going to put up at Larry Dunn's farm. It is a tidy enough place and at a very convenient distance from most of the refractory tenants. I shall be able to ride over when needful. I could not think of trespassing on your hospitality."

"But for to-night?" she urged. "Surely you will dine and stay the night. I could not think of your going off to Larry's farm just on your arrival; it would be a sad slur on Irish hospitality."

He looked admiringly at the beautiful woman. He thought he had never seen any one so lovely, or with such a charming grace of manner.

"I cannot be churlish enough to refuse you, Lady Ellingsworth," he said, "if you are quite sure that I am not putting you to inconvenience."

"There is room and to spare here, as you know," she said smiling. "It means nothing but preparing a bed."

"Only my clothes!" he exclaimed. "I sent my port-manteau on to Larry Dunn's in a cart."

"We will excuse you for appearing in ordinary dress, and I will send one of the men to bring your luggage here."

"Ah! I see it is useless to place obstacles in the way, Lady Ellingsworth. I give in—only too readily."

"That is all settled," she said, "and as we don't dine till half-past seven o'clock perhaps you would like to walk through the grounds. Our business matters can wait till to-morrow morning."

She rose as she spoke. She had not yet removed her bonnet or given orders about his room and a slight addition to the usual simple dinner.

Her glance fell on Kitty. "Won't you go out too, my dear?" she said kindly. "You have been in the house all day, and you doubtless will enjoy exploring the place. There are lovely bits in the park. I dare say Mr. Moira knows them as well as I do."

"Oh! it's many years since I was here," he said. "And then I'm afraid it was more mischief than appreciation that led us into the park—or the orchard either. Well, come along, Miss——" He paused.

"Maguire," said Lady Ellingsworth. "I thought Kitty had introduced herself."

"I think we did without that formality," he said smiling. "Miss Maguire, then, I'll see if my memory serves me at all."

"I must fetch my hat," she said, and she left the room with a slight graceful bow.

"What a lovely girl!" exclaimed Laurence Moira. "Surely she is very young to be a companion, Lady Ellingsworth?"

"Oh! she mentioned that? Yes, she is young, Mr. Moira, but I took her out of charity really, for she was in a very humble position and anxious to do better for herself. She has been well educated; it seemed a pity that she should not rise above the level of the village folk."

Laurence Moira looked surprised. "I should never have guessed she was not a lady," he said. "Do you mean to say her parents are only of the people?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"Well, one comes across strange things in Ireland," he said. "But you certainly surprise me. She was singing when I came in, and——" He stopped abruptly, remembering his promise.

"Oh, was she?" said Lady Ellingsworth indifferently. "She is fond of music, she told me, but I have not heard her play or sing yet. Oh, I hear her coming. I hope, Mr. Moira, you don't object to her walking with you?"

"Object? My dear lady, I am not thin-skinned at all. A charming girl is to me always a charming girl whatever her station in life. All the same, you may trust me. I shall take no advantage of what you have told me. I can't alter my opinion because of your communication."

Kitty's entrance prevented further reply.

In his secret heart Laurence Moira thought it was a little unkind of Lady Ellingsworth to have given him so broad a hint, but then, he told himself, she might have feared his finding out who Kitty was for himself. He walked on by the girl's side in comparative silence, the strains of "Shule Agra" still ringing in his ears, with its plaintive cry of sorrow and its tender lament. Genius is no respecter of persons, no more is beauty. He knew that well enough. Yet it did not check a wish that this lovely young creature was well-born as well as gifted.

Then he saw her eyes, and the old couplet came into his head:—

Those sparkling eyes so wild and gay,
They move not in the light of love.

"And a good thing too perhaps," he reflected. "She must keep herself heartwhole if she wishes to make her way in the world."

The information he had acquired about her did not alter his manner in the least degree. It was—if anything—even more studiously polite than usual. Not for the world would he have hurt her feelings or presumed on their easy intimacy.

He noted that she was very reserved about herself, and would tell him nothing of her early days. They discussed the question of her becoming a singer with a great deal of interest. It seemed to him the very best thing she could do, and he told her that if Lady Ellingsworth was interested in her future she would certainly assist it. Once she heard her sing there could be no two opinions about what her career ought to be.

They roamed through the park and then the flower garden and terrace, and returned to the house just as the dressing bell was ringing.

"I shall not come in to dinner," said the girl as they entered the hall side by side; "I am not permitted to do that when there is company."

He looked surprised.

"But I," he said, "am not company, surely."

"Oh! it's not you only; a friend of Lady Ellingsworth's is dining here also, and they are to sit in judgment upon me afterwards."

"You must be 'Orpheus the Shades,'" he said laughing, "and disarm them,"

"Ah!" she said, "your opinion is too flattering, I think. I hardly expect they will indorse it."

"Let 'Shule Agra' be your wand of enchantment," he said. "It would melt even a heart of stone."

She smiled. She was already softened and subdued by this new influence. For the first time in her life she had learnt that she had not only the charm of sex, but a power far higher and more potent with which to make her way in the world, and seize those prizes of fame and fortune for which she longed. And a man had been her first pioneer.

No wonder she felt grateful. No wonder she went up to her quiet, pretty room glad and hopeful, as in all her life she had never been.

She seated herself by the open window in the lovely glow of twilight. A bird fluttered against the rose-trellised walk below. The evening star showed itself like a pale glow-worm in the rich saffron-tinted sky. That lovely hush of the closing day was like a spell upon earth and air. It seemed as if nothing unholy or impure could dwell within its reach.

Kitty gave herself up to the luxury of such dreams as never yet had filled her brain. Dreams of a glorious future when she should have risen by right of her own gifts to the heights of fame. She forgot her poverty, her birth and all it typified; forgot that she was only here on sufferance, and that this experiment might only be another fairy tale—to find its end in as dull prose as that other in which she had held brief revel.

Youth is essentially self-delusive. It overlooks obvious truths in favor of impossibilities, and turns aside difficulties as being merely trivial delays. It was only when a servant came to say that Kitty's dinner was awaiting her in the morning-room that she remembered where she was, and recognized with a sudden truth that between her and those among whom she lived and moved "on sufferance" there was a great gulf fixed.

To bridge that gulf by some means, fair or foul, was the one resolve in her heart as she went downstairs and took her place at the table prepared for her.

It was better than her old life—it was better than she had ever dared to hope—it was better than Biddy and the cottage, the humble farm, and the ragged clothes; but it was

not what she wished, it was not what she intended to get for herself. It might serve as a beginning, even as in the old fairy tale the cottage served the fisherman's wife better than the hovel, but like that prototype of feminine ambition Kitty would ask for more and yet more—the sum of her discontent only increasing instead of diminishing with each granted desire.

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She finished her meal and rang for the tray to be removed. She supposed she would be summoned to the drawing-room when she was wanted.

She had no idea of the rules or etiquette of life lived by people such as Lady Ellingsworth. The lamps were lit now and she took a book and began to read. It was an hour later when Lady Ellingsworth sent for her, and Kitty obeyed the summons with some trepidation. Why, she could not have said, but she had formed a prejudice against Mrs. Montessor.

The two women were sitting by the open window sipping their coffee. Laurence Moira had not yet left the dining-room.

They both looked at Kitty as she crossed the room toward them. She wore the same simple black gown—she had no other—and they were both in demi-toilette, looking in her eyes so distinguished and so far superior to herself that all her confidence vanished.

Judith Montessor gave a faint exclamation as the girl drew near.

Something in her face, her carriage, struck her as strangely familiar. It had nothing to do with the change wrought by those years of absence—nothing to do with the transition from girl to maiden; it was a curious inexplicable likeness to another face—and yet she had never thought Hermia resembled her father.

"Kitty," said Lady Ellingsworth, "this is my friend, Mrs. Montessor. I have been telling her about you. Of course she has often seen you, but I am sure like myself she would hardly have recognized you again."

"Indeed I would not," said Judith, holding out her hand cordially. "How you have grown—and—and altered," she continued,

“Would you like some coffee?” asked Hermia, offering her a cup.

The girl took it and sat down.

She felt embarrassed and ill at ease. Fine lady manners do not after all come by instinct.

Hermia noticed her confusion and left her to herself. After all she could not quite forget Kitty as the ragged picturesque child running wild about the village, and it was not possible to treat her as an equal.

She and Judith resumed their discussion, which turned on young Moira, and Kitty listened silently and drank her coffee and felt very uncomfortable and subdued, and wished that she had not been asked into the drawing-room.

It was a relief to all when Laurence Moira entered at last, bringing with him that brisk, breezy sense of life and interests that the male element always does bring into the feminine atmosphere, let them deny it as they please.

The conversation became general, until he asked if Kitty would not sing. Lady Ellingsworth echoed the wish, and he followed the girl to the piano and opened it.

“No music, thank you,” she said, as he took up the book of Irish songs from its place. “I never use notes for my national songs.”

“‘Shule Agra,’ mind,” he said, and then left her and went over to the window, the better to enjoy the effect.

Kitty had not sung the first half-dozen bars before both Hermia and Judith turned, and gazed at each other and then at the girl in utter amazement.

Such a voice, as Laurence Moira had said, was almost phenomenal; they had never heard its like. As the plaintive wail rang out at the conclusion of each verse:—

Go, *thu, thu* Mavourneen Slaun!
Shule, Shule, Shule Agra!

the tears were rolling down their cheeks. It was no question of false sentiment—it was simply that the lovely notes went straight to the heart, and thrilled its every nerve to a delight that was almost pain.

It was the *voix de larmes* in its most perfect and exquisite phase, fresh with the freshness of youth and scarcely conscious of its own power.

The girl herself guessed nothing of the effect it had on

her hearers. Singing to her was no more effort than speaking, and if her voice-production was not exactly what would satisfy a professional teacher, it, at least, had the most extraordinary effects upon an audience that asked no more than the continuance of those exquisite tones which gave so weird a pathos to her national melodies.

Lady Ellingsworth rose hurriedly and approached her as she ceased.

“Why, Kitty,” she exclaimed, “your voice is wonderful. I had no idea you could sing like this!”

The girl colored with pleasure. “I told Mr. Marsden,” she said, “but he would not listen.”

Lady Ellingsworth regarded her thoughtfully. “Would you care,” she asked, “to make music your profession—to become a singer?”

“I should like nothing better,” answered Kitty.

“I must talk to my father about it,” said Hermia. “Meanwhile, sing again if you are not tired. It is really a treat to hear such a voice.”

She stood by the piano while the girl’s fingers wandered into the prelude to “Oft in the Stilly Night,” which she sang even more exquisitely than she had sung “Shule Agra.”

Hermia returned to Judith Montessor’s side. Their eyes met.

“It is perfectly marvelous,” they said.

But Hermia, as she half closed her eyes and leant back in the rapt enjoyment of listening, wondered why a note here and there recalled a boy’s voice soaring up to the roof of a village chapel in the “*Salutaris Hostia*” of the Mass. How many years ago she had heard that voice! Why did its haunting echoes live again in the one she heard to-night?

CHAPTER XXXIII.

KITTY retired early to her room, and the three who remained behind were conscious of a restraint lifted by her departure from the conversation.

Lady Ellingsworth began to speak to Laurence Moira of her difficulties with the tenants, and her fruitless efforts to alter their improvident habits.

He seemed however more amused than disturbed by her difficulties.

"I don't really see why you should worry yourself, Lady Ellingsworth," he said. "After all, they are accountable to my uncle, and he should have left a responsible steward to look after them."

"But I begged him to let me see what I could do," she said eagerly. "And at first they seemed so willing to work their best, and so good humored and content, but now—well, I can really do nothing with them. It seems as if some underhand influence was at work and that all my good intentions are misrepresented. Your uncle hasn't had any rents at all this year."

"But," he said, "I thought it was only the house and the home farm you had taken?"

"You mean, that I have rented. Yes; but I promised to look after the estate generally. I thought it would be something to occupy my time."

It struck Laurence Moira as somewhat strange that a woman, young and beautiful, and with everything to make her popular, should require more occupation than her home and society afforded.

"The country altogether is in a very unsatisfactory condition," he said. "Political prejudices are again to the fore, and those who call themselves patriots are as usual proving the worthlessness of their title."

"The Irish are always their own worst foes," observed Mrs. Montessor. "They are fond of saying the English can't understand them, but do they *allow* themselves to be understood? Anything good in the way of art or commerce

is whisked off to a foreign market. Their men of genius follow the example of the absentee landlords. Intellectual famine has improverished the country on the one hand, and agrarian laws on the other, while religion has added its quota to the universal misery by leaving the peasantry steeped in the degradation of their superstitious and bigoted beliefs."

"Do you believe, then, that religion and priesthood mean one and the same thing?" he asked.

"Indeed, no," she said eagerly, "otherwise the world would indeed be in a sorry condition. But that is what the priesthood tries to impress on its followers."

"Mrs. Montessor is a warm partisan of unprejudiced truth," said Hermia. "I tell her she ought to found an order for herself, and become the exponent of her own opinions."

"But before we run down the priests," said Laurence Moira, "don't you think we should give them the credit of best understanding the needs of the people they rule? Of course, there is no doubt they *do* rule them. No one who has lived among the Irish can doubt it. They fear their priests more than their ostensible rulers, more than any government, and the greatest stumbling-block to English authority or English influence has been the difference of religion between the two countries."

"I am beginning to find that out," said Hermia quietly. "But as Ireland becomes a reading, she will also become a *thinking* country, and surely a people so quick of wit and keen of sight will soon discover the errors that have enslaved them, and laugh at the superstitions that have so long enfeebled their reasoning powers."

Laurence Moira shook his head. "This century at least will never see such enlightenment," he said, "and even the next may scarcely witness its acknowledgment. The national spirit may rise above the narrow distinctions of party or race—it will hardly soar above the trammels of creed."

"But priest and Protestant meet now on friendly terms," said Hermia.

"Yes," he said laughing. "But may not another sort of 'national spirit' account for that?"

"I am ashamed of you, Mr. Moira," said Hermia smiling. "But it reminds me that I have forgotten to tell you that the 'national spirit' is awaiting yourself in the library, also that you are at liberty to smoke there if you wish. I am sorry I have no cigars to offer you. It is so long since I have had any

gentlemen visitors that I have ceased to provide for these male weaknesses."

"Thank you," he said gratefully. "I have come provided for all emergencies. At what time to-morrow are we to go into these matters, Lady Ellingsworth?"

"We breakfast at nine," she said. "Will ten o'clock suit you?"

"Perfectly. I am quite at your service, and I can ride over to Larry Dunn's afterwards."

"If you like I will ride over with you," said Hermia. "We can start directly after luncheon."

He agreed with alacrity, and then bade them both good-night.

"You mustn't leave just yet, Judith," said Hermia as the door closed. "I ordered the carriage to come around at eleven. Sit down now and let us have a word about Kitty. Did you ever hear such singing?"

"Indeed, I can truthfully say I never did," answered Judith Montessor. "The girl's vocation is evident. Even young Moira seemed convinced of that!"

"Yes, he was very enthusiastic," said Hermia thoughtfully.

"What a pleasant young fellow he is," said Judith. "So cheery and unaffected. After all," she added with a faint sigh, "how much there is in 'youth.' Just the fact. The consciousness of being young, of looking forward, of hope and expectation."

"And illusion," said Hermia bitterly.

"True! but not having learned its worthlessness we regard it as reality. But to return to Kitty. I must confess to being utterly astonished at the change in her. She is most beautiful; and not only that, she has a natural grace and the instincts of adaptability. With those gifts and her wonderful voice that young person will make her way in the world."

"I am sure of that," said Hermia. "I was only wondering whether I had better keep her here for a few months and accustom her to this sort of life, or ask my father to continue her musical education."

"Her voice has been well trained, I should say," observed Mrs. Montessor. "But her manners are somewhat *gauche*. It would do her a great deal of good to live for a time among refined surroundings, especially if she adopts music as a profession. Besides, did not your father say that he had done all he intended to do for her?"

"Yes; but if he knew of this wonderful talent he would surely alter his intentions," said Hermia. "It is hardly fair to the girl to have done so much, and then leave off at a critical juncture."

"You must persuade him to hear her," said Judith Montessor. "Is he still as averse to visitors and company?"

"Yes. He refused even Mr. Kilmayne the other day."

"It is very strange," said Judith.

"It is very bad for him, I think," answered Hermia.

"You should try to persuade him to see young Moira. He would do him good. Besides, they would have a common interest in the wrongs of the peasantry."

"My father will never regard them in any light but that of his own prejudices," said Hermia sadly. "Arguments are useless; I suppose one must be Irish to understand the Irish."

"Well," said Judith with a smile, "I confess I have never known a people whose character is so anomalous. You come across families so imbued with the spirit of their ancestors that their whole lives are regulated by what has been done and said centuries before. Even the veneration they show for superior knowledge springs from quite reprehensible ignorance. That slavish content with what 'has been' is the bane of the peasant. A little Latin is even a more dangerous thing than 'a little learning' in Ireland."

Hermia rose and began to pace the room with a sort of despairing hopelessness on her beautiful face. "Oh!" she cried, "the uselessness of life—love—everything! And one's poor little efforts, Judith. I meant to do so much, to help, encourage, befriend these thriftless, foolish creatures. And what does it all amount to? Then look at my father's present situation, one of mutual distrust and dislike, and yet how much he has improved the district, and what an amount of extra wages and employment is due to him. Yet his life has been attempted, and he is now at enmity with the very class he has tried to benefit."

"'Do good for good's sake,'" quoted Judith Montessor. "To try and benefit our fellows because it addends to our own credit or comfort always strikes me as a form of selfishness. It is quite as unworthy as the desire of getting to heaven because it is a pleasanter place than hell. The surface view of both proceedings is certainly highly moral, but the motives—what about them?"

"'Vanity, vanity, all is vanity,' cried the preacher!"

"Yes; but he still taught the people knowledge," said Judith; "and I suppose we must be content to follow his example."

"But *is* it knowledge?" exclaimed Hermia. "We spend one half our lives in unlearning what we have been taught in the other half—either by scholastic traditions or worldly experience. And just as we begin to see that it was useless or imperfect, or altogether wrong, it is about time to lay down the burden of life!"

"The perpetual enigma," murmured Judith. "Our varying moods—our contradictory natures—our passionate hearts, bound up in the physiological and spiritual mystery of ourselves. Ah, Hermia, haven't we discussed it all *ad nauseum* without result?"

"Perhaps we should try to put more into our lives," said Hermia dreamily. "Thoughts into words—words into actions. There must be some way, Judith!"

"I am inclined to think so," answered Judith gravely. Then she smiled oddly. "And I am inclined to think that young man has found it," she added.

"Who—Laurence Moira?"

"Yes—watch him. Study him, Hermia. It may give you a new interest or widen the old ones."

Hermia looked at her steadily as if seeking some ulterior motive in the words.

"He made me feel so old," she said drearily; "so old, Judith. And what has not been a blunder in my life looks a series of pretences."

"Ah, dearest, don't speak like that! It makes me wretched."

Hermia saw the tears gather in her eyes.

"That wail of the 'Shule Agra' keeps ringing in my ears," she said rising suddenly. "How strange that a young ignorant heart could lend so true an interpretation to what must have been unknown as yet."

Hermia was silent. She thought of that other voice that had been capable of swaying a listening multitude with its soul-thrilling vibrations—she thought of the haunting echo in the girl's tones to-night. It seemed to her that she was always to be haunted by some ghost from that past. That its full-pulsed, passionate memories were never to be stilled—quite.

Here, again, suddenly and unexpectedly something had recalled them. That strange feeling, half curiosity, half repug-

nance, with which she had regarded Kitty, returned in full force. The girl had only been a day in the house as yet, and already was a disturbing presence.

Her beauty, her genius—for it was genius in a way—seemed to clamor for preëminence, and life was all in warfare against her. It was useless, Hermia felt, to argue that she at least had no responsibility in the matter. The claims of womanhood, of charity, of the bonds of sex alike clamored for her notice, and something in the untamed spirit that looked out from those young eyes reminded her of her own youth—her own unhappiness—of some strange mystery oppressing those early days and making her an alien in the midst of home ties. The sorrow for her own neglected youth had made her infinitely pitiful to the young of her own sex in those later days—ininitely gentle to sins and sinners, despite her pride and seeming coldness.

“I shall keep her with me for a time,” she said suddenly.

Judith Montessor started. She had been gazing out at the starlit sky, and her thoughts had drifted far away on a sea of her own memories. “Keep her ; who do you mean—Kitty ?” she asked.

“Yes, I think it will be best,” said Hermia.

“Unless she should fall in love with Laurence Moira,” suggested Judith.

“I never thought of that,” said Hermia uneasily. “But they need not meet often. It is not as if he were staying here.”

“Irishmen are susceptible, you know,” said Judith with her quiet smile, “and Kitty is very lovely. I never saw a more beautiful face except ——”

“Whose ?” asked Hermia quickly and uneasily.

Judith’s eyes fell. For a moment she did not answer, then she said slowly, “Are you considered like your father, Hermia ?”

“I ? Oh ! no. I take after my mother’s side of the house.”

“The carriage is here, if you please, my lady,” announced Garry, the footman, at the door.

And in saying good-night, and arranging for their next meeting, Hermia never noticed that her question had not been answered.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE advent of Laurence Moira seemed to bring a new interest into Hermia's life from the first day of their acquaintance. His brisk, breezy way of looking at things, the quickness with which he arranged or settled matters that to her had seemed complicated, all woke in her a sense of relief, and, while easing her difficulties, made her wonder they should ever have seemed a burden.

As they rode side by side to the farm of the refractory Corrigan's, they talked chiefly of the eternal "Irish Question"—that question which seems destined never to be answered satisfactorily by policy or power. Laurence had evidently all an Irishman's sympathy with the Irish people, as well as a keen insight into the cause of various follies and weaknesses which have led to so many disasters. Taking the physical state of the peasantry from its various periods of moral and mental wretchedness, its destitution and ignorance, he pointed out that the crimes were not so blamable as their cause. To begin with, the Irish were almost two centuries behind the Scotch or English people in elementary education, and their very ignorance had been punished while they were endeavoring to combat it. For some reason best known to themselves, it had suited the priests to keep their flocks in a semisavage and misinformed condition, and, to a class of persons always remarkable for strong religious and political prejudices, such ignorance and superstition could only breed dangerous theories that had their results in social errors, and general turbulence and disaster.

"I hardly think," said Laurence, "that any other race would have been as meek and patient under suffering as our maligned Celt. With scarcely any personal or domestic comfort—with bad rulers, bad teachers, bad influences at work around and about him, with a hereditary hatred of laws that were alike unsuitable and unjust—the marvel is that violence and crime have not been universal instead of only factional or political."

"Do you think a better system of education would have prevented those crimes?" asked Lady Ellingsworth.

"I am sure of it. The crimes after all were not so much individual as confederate. The perpetrators were not hardened criminals, but simply the tools of a party, and scarcely more blamable than is the gun in the hand of the marksman. You know how easily swayed these people are by the emotion of the moment—how bound together by love of country and home—how long enslaved by ignorance and ruled by spiritual fear and the lowest forms of superstition. How could the calm, prosaic, order-loving mind of a totally distinct race hope to govern them to their own satisfaction?"

"Do you think, then, if they were allowed their own rulers they would be satisfied?"

"For a time—yes. But whether the rulers would succeed in settling party difficulties, mending broken laws, and establishing order and morality instead of discontent, I very much doubt."

"But if they were happier," sighed Hermia. "Oh! the scenes I have witnessed, the poverty and misery I have seen!"

Laurence Moira looked at her troubled face in some wonder.

"Happiness," he said, "is not usually a matter considered by governments. Discipline and order are all they seek to enforce. Fancy, however, a set of men ruling Ireland who would introduce the Ribbon Code as a National Law! And yet it was considered a patriotic code fifty years ago."

"It first made us a nation of absentee landlords, did it not?"

"Indeed, yes; small blame to them if they preferred a whole skin to being riddled with bullets. It was a dastardly thing. It not only oppressed the landlord, but the tenant. If either disobeyed its rules it meant certain death. Its victims were from all ranks of life, and its fraternity a band of merciless assassins sworn to carry out any decree the chiefs approved."

"Ah! well," said Hermia, "those days are over. There is no fear of their repetition. And here we are at Corrigan's. Look at Micky! and did you ever see such a disreputable place?"

"They seem to be having a party, don't they?" asked Laurence Moira, as he drew rein and paused beside the miserable shanty.

"Shure, 'tis the lady from Mount Moira," exclaimed a voice. "Ah, thin, good day to your honor's worship, 'tis one av the family ye are, as any one kin see."

“Why, Johanna, is that you?” said Lady Ellingsworth, “where have you been all this long time?”

The Swan dropped a gracious curtsy and murmured a blessing, to which she added as an appendix that she had been on her “peregrinashuns.”

“And ’tis meself is plazed to welcome ye, me darlin’ gintleman,” she went on, “I heard as you were intindin’ to honor us all wid a sight av ye, and I had a hint of managin’ and interfayrin’, which is a matter of taste, and not to be rashly or unadvisedly undertaken. But no doubt the study of the law has taught ye to be circumspect, and a grand study it is intirely, wid a rayson for iverything natural or unnatural.”

“Mr. Moira has come to have a talk with Micky,” said Lady Ellingsworth. “Are you,”—she hesitated, then added, “visiting them?”

“I am partaking of their hospitality at this prisint moment,” answered the Swan loftily. “Shure, isn’t Moll Corrigan my own mother’s cousin? and we was as fine a pair av dancers as ye’d find the country side whin we was young, and afore she took up and married that thafe o’ the wurd yonder. Ah! ye may look, Micky Corrigan, I’m sayin’ it to your own face—an idle, drunken, unchristian Anthernitarian as ye are, and didn’t Father Flaherty himself say that ov ye only the last Sunday as iver was, when it made the sixteenth, ye’d nivir been to mass at all, at all!”

“I want a word with you, Micky,” said Laurence Moira, springing from his saddle and ruthlessly cutting short the skein of Johanna Reardon’s eloquence.

He walked up to the door of the cabin, against which its ragged unshaven owner was leaning in a half somnolent condition, born of the heat and the contents of a quart bottle of whisky, the neck of which was protruding from his coat pocket. The man was sulky and almost insolent at first; but Laurence spoke firmly and clearly on the subject of his misdemeanors, and mentioned his own intentions in the matter of rent and farming.

“This place is going to rack and ruin,” he said. “Ten years ago there was not a better farm on the estate. It is only due to your own laziness and drunken habits.”

“Ah! thin, maybe, sir, ye’ll try your own hand at it,” said Micky insolently. “It’s not my fault if the soil’s bad and the wheat won’t grow.”

“Then if this farm is such an unprofitable one, why not try another?” said Laurence Moira.

"Another!" the man drew himself up savagely. "Faix, I'd like to see meself at it. 'Twas my father's before me, and it'll be my own son's afther me; and I'd like to see the man as would take the place from me, or interfere wid a stick or a stone av it."

"You will certainly see that man, and before long too," answered young Moira quietly. "My uncle has appointed an agent, and he will insist on arrears of rent being paid or else turn out the defaulters."

The man laughed. "Let him try," he said. "I'm not going out av here while there's a breath in my body; and if you try force there's thim as will look afther me—ay, and revenge me too!"

"Oh! is that the way with you?" said Moira coolly. "I thought there was some one at the back of all this late mischief. Well, look here, Micky Corrigan, I'm an Irishman like yourself, and I know a great deal more than you do about the rights and wrongs of the people. I sympathize with any industrious, hardworking man who has done his best for the land and the family, and failed to make it pay; but I have no patience with you idle, useless cumberers of the soil, who won't take the trouble to do a useful day's work unless you see starvation at the door! I can soon judge to which class you belong, my good man, and I give you fair warning that you'll get justice and *no more* at my hands when there's a day of reckoning between us."

"And who may *you* be, sir, wid your airs and authority? I'm Mr. Moira's tinant, and sorra a bit will I stir to serve any one beside——"

"And I am Mr. Moira's nephew and agent," said Laurence quietly.

The man's face fell. "You?" he said. "You are the agint ye were spakin' of?"

"Yes, and I meant every word I said. Don't you think, Micky, it would be better to put your shoulder to the wheel and set to work to make things better? Look at Knockrea and Dunsane. We ought to be ashamed to say that the two most creditable estates in the country are worked and directed by Englishmen!"

Micky drew himself up with a sudden air of dignity. "Faix, sir, it nivir struck me in that light," he said. "Do you mane that an Irishman can't kape a dacint roof over his head and do a dacint piece of farming if he's minded to?"

"I mean," said Laurence Moira smiling, "that there's nothing in the world an Irishman can't do or attempt to do, *if he's minded*."

"Ah! thin, 'tis your honor's self knows the ways av it," said Micky, "and I'll show yer honor that ye've not misread us. Work, is it? Shure, I'm the bhoys to work whin I'm put to it."

"That's right," said Laurence cheerfully, "and just take a bit of advice, and pay a little less court to that bad friend I see sticking out of your pocket. It interferes not only with work but with good intentions. And now good-morning to you; I hope the next time I ride over I'll find things looking a little better, and it's time that wheat yonder was cut. They've got in all theirs at Larry Dunn's, where I'm staying."

"Staying at Dunn's, are ye? Shure, your honor ought to be at the house."

"That is let, you know. Besides, I prefer being at Larry's. I can keep an eye on you all."

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"And how did you get on?" asked Lady Ellingsworth as they rode off. "Micky was quite polite at parting."

"Oh! I think I talked him over," said Laurence. "But there is undoubtedly some antagonistic power at work here stirring up the old strife and discontent."

Lady Ellingsworth was silent. They rode slowly on for some moments under the chequered shade of the bending boughs. The air had all the balmy softness of summer tempered with the freshness that makes the months of August and September peculiarly delightful in mountain districts.

On the summit of the hill they paused as if by mutual consent, and gazed out at the blue waters of the bay, above which floated light masses of rain-charged clouds, whose tearful threats the sunshine laughed to scorn.

"Poor, lovely, 'distressful' country!" exclaimed Lady Ellingsworth involuntarily.

"Yes," said Laurence, a momentary shadow on his bright young face. "It is all that, Lady Ellingsworth. Yet there is delighting and delightful life everywhere around. If only it could be made peaceable and law-abiding!"

"It will be a work of time. It need not be hopeless," she said. "But also it would be the work of wise heads and understanding hearts."

"A difficult combination," he said. "For Ireland is like a woman: the hand that rules her must be tender as well as strong."

"You believe in the mastery of sex then?"

"I do. Clever, intelligent, and important as women are, it is not wise to give them their head. With them, love of power is only a higher form of vanity. And even intellectual ambition is often the mere outcome of a morbid curiosity. A woman too has so long been used to reach a man through his worst side instead of his best, that she makes him her advocate less through her superiority than his senses. We have plenty of advanced women nowadays, Lady Ellingsworth. By the end of the century there will be plenty more. One wonders what the result of feminine insubordination will be; what really is the true inscription on the banner of defiance they seem desirous to unfurl."

She looked at him with some curiosity.

"I see you have made good use of your time," she said. "I used to wonder why men objected to woman moving out of what they have chosen to call her 'proper sphere.' But, after all, I think they are wise to wish to keep her there. We are safer, purer, better, with our eyes bandaged to evil, and our hearts only conscious that sin exists. Once we *know*, taste, feel, handle for ourselves, all the charm of youth and joy of life are gone. Nothing that experience brings, compensates for what illusion loses."

She sighed, and drew the reins together and gave her mare the signal to advance. He followed, wondering; a little puzzled, a great deal interested in this beautiful woman.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A FEW days later Hermia drove over to Knockrea to speak to her father on the subject of Kitty.

She found him sitting on the terrace in a long, low basket chair, revelling in the warm sunshine that showed up so remorselessly the lines on his haggard face, the attenuation of his frame, the ravages of illness and of age.

The contrast between her perfect health and wonderful beauty and his own decrepitude struck him afresh as his irritated glance rested on her face, and read its soft compassion.

He passively suffered the touch of her lips on his brow, and then bade the footman bring another chair out for her, and went on reading his paper.

"I have come to speak to you about something important," said Hermia gently, as she drew the light seat nearer to him. "Will you listen?"

"Your affairs of importance are seldom worth the time spent in discussing them," was the ungracious response.

But he laid the newspaper down on his knee and looked at her from under the broad, soft brim of his summer hat.

"It is about Kitty," she said hurriedly. "Had you any idea that she possessed a wonderful voice—really wonderful? You know I am no mean judge, and I do not get enthusiastic over trifles. She would be one of the singers of the age—if not *the* singer—with two years' proper musical training."

"Indeed," he said. "Well, you can give it her if you wish."

"I?" she started and colored warmly. "I thought she was your *protégée*, father."

"*Was*—yes. But I distinctly told her I had done all I intended to do for her. I had my own reasons for having her educated, my own reasons for judging for myself of the effects of a different life and her own powers of adaptability. She can make her own way in the world now."

For a moment Hermia was silent. Her face grew as white

as her gown, a look of resolve and firmness came into her beautiful eyes.

"Father," she said, "as we are discussing this subject, I should like to ask you a question."

He leant back in his chair and smiled ironically. "By all means ask it," he said, "as long as it is not the vexed one of rent, or eviction."

"No," she said. "It is only this. Have you any *reason* for your interest in this child?"

"Yes, I have," he answered quietly, and his eyes met hers with the look she hated—the look that meant unpardoned and unpardonable remembrance.

"Do you know," she went on, averting her eyes, "what has been said about that—interest?"

"I can quite imagine. I know the capabilities of Irish curiosity and Irish invention."

Again she was silent. His cold eyes still watched her with merciless scrutiny.

"It is not true, I suppose," she said suddenly. "You are not really acquainted with the mystery of her parentage?"

"That," he said, "I decline to answer. People are at liberty to say what they please. It has never troubled me. I do not intend it shall trouble me now."

"No," she said. "It is not you it would trouble; but what about Kitty herself. Is it fair to have done all this, and encouraged her ambition for a sphere so widely different to the one she occupied, and then drop her into the lap of chance, or leave her to the world's scant charity?"

"I see you are warmly interested," he said. "The future rests with you."

"I might deny that responsibility even at your bidding. Why should I take on my shoulders a burden you have grown weary of?"

"You will know some day," he answered. "It may be a long or a short time, but, be quite sure of this, *you will learn the truth at last*. I shall take care of that. Meanwhile, if you are really interested in her, serve her in any way you think best. No doubt she will be duly grateful. It is only those we benefit who most surely return to sting the hand that has served them."

Hermia was silent. Her eyes were on her restless hands as they toyed with the rings upon her fingers; her face looked colorless and disturbed.

"If I agree with her wish," she said, "and make her a singer, it will be a considerable expense. You know that my income is not too large for my wants now."

"I know," he said, "that you foolishly lessened it by paying racing debts for your husband. I know too that you have spent far more than you need have done in benefiting another person's property. But it is no concern of mine. You are not bound to give in to this girl's whim—for no doubt it is only a whim. I remember you yourself at one period of your life were crazy to go on the stage. I remember that your voice was considered remarkable."

A hot painful flush crept to her face. Her lip quivered.

"This is no whim," she said passionately. "The girl has genius—power—of no common order. I feel it unfair to her not to give her the opportunity and aid she deserves."

"Then why not give it? You are good at preaching self-denial. The loss of a few Paris gowns, or the putting down of one or two of your carriage horses, ought not to stand in the way of exercising your favorite virtue."

He saw the color ebb away from her cheek. He knew that every word went cruelly home to her sensitive heart. She rose abruptly. "I will consider the matter," she said. "I confess your own indifference is a mystery to me. Perhaps if you heard her——"

He made a slight impatient gesture. "Oh! spare me that. The warblings of a Malibran or a Grisi would not charm me now. I only want to be left in peace, which is the last thing people seem inclined to permit."

"I will not trouble you further," she said coldly. "I thought it only right to let you know Kitty had every prospect of securing position and independence in the future. She is very proud and very ambitious. A dependent position seems intolerable to her. Although she has no claim on me save that of womanhood and misfortune, I shall take up the duty you have begun—but remember I do it for *your* sake as much as for hers."

A gleam of the old cynical humor came into his eyes.

"That is really more than I have any right to expect," he said. "I trust you will find that charity, like virtue, will bring its own reward in the future."

She left his presence with the same resentful feeling that he invariably roused. She could never explain its cause, but it was always there.

The mystery of Kitty perplexed her more and more. Even to her it seemed as if there could be but one natural explanation of it; and yet why was this change of attitude at the very time he seemed called upon to exert his utmost influence on the girl's behalf? Why had he so coolly thrown his responsibility on Hermia's shoulders? What had he meant by those mocking counsels?

As she drove home she felt a vexed impatience even at her own interest. But the girl charmed her, despite a half-reluctant resistance to that charm. Besides, there was something about her that recalled so many strange memories.

At times she felt inclined to seek Biddy Maguire and ask her to throw some light on the subject; but the dread of having her own suspicions verified restrained that impulse. Besides, it could make no real difference now.

Fate had thrown the girl into her care whether she wished it or not. The very resentment she felt at her father's behavior in the matter only increased her own sense of responsibility. She could not turn Kitty adrift; she could not counsel her to return to poverty and obscurity; she could not blind her own eyes to the wonderful loveliness and wonderful genius the girl possessed. With the knowledge of these facts staring her in the face she felt that the unwritten law of woman's obligation to woman clamored for its rights more strongly than any other.

"I must do what I can for her," she thought. "It would be unfair to keep her in a dependent position when she can so easily fit herself for a better one."

She reached home at luncheon time, and took that meal in company with Kitty.

Even in this short space the girl had learnt to adapt herself to a different mode of life. Her voice had a more subdued tone; her step was less brisk and assertive. She noted every grace and charm of Lady Ellingsworth, and set herself to copy them in her own fashion.

Her hostess spoke very little to her during the meal. She was absorbed in thoughts that wavered between her father's strange behavior and her own intentions.

"Your afternoons are free to do as you please," she said to Kitty, as she at last rose from the table. "Perhaps you would like to go and see Biddy Maguire. If so, will you tell her that I intend to have you trained for a singer, and that you will probably have to go abroad? I will take you to Milan as

soon as the hot weather is over, and see that you are placed in good hands."

"*You!*" exclaimed Kitty in unfeigned astonishment. "Has Mr. Marsden said anything about it?"

"He has left it to me and yourself," said Hermia coldly. "It seems the best thing to be done. Talent is too rare a thing to be wasted, and I am sure you will do your utmost to fulfil my anticipations."

Their eyes met, gravely, curiously, inquiringly.

"It is very good of you to trouble yourself about me," said the girl at last. "I am very grateful; I will do my best."

But there was no gratitude in her heart, and the heavy lashes hid her eyes in whose sombre depths lurked both envy and distrust.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

So once again the wheel of destiny had turned in Kitty's favor, and her vivid imagination showed her to herself rich, famous and independent.

She walked through the village that afternoon with her head erect and her eyes bright with triumph. How she hated the place, and the familiar greetings and the good-humored irony of those who had once been her companions!

Every smile and nod irritated her. She hated to think she had ever been a common ragged child, running barefooted over the ill-paved streets; hated to think that but for one lucky chance she would now be only a barelegged colleen, with no thought beyond the rough gaiety of fair or market, or the young farmers who joked and danced with her at wake or wedding.

"Ah! Kitty child! Ah, well, look at her now!—the grand airs av her!" "Shure, 'tis a royal princess she's afther fancyin' she is!" "Ah, Blessed Mother! to think 'tis the same child as I'd give a douse o' the churn stuff to as soon as look at her. Musha, musha, the changes in this world!"

Those and such like remarks greeted her progress, and by no means improved her temper.

When she reached Biddy's she was hot and dusty and tired with her long walk. She found the Dalin' Woman entertaining the Red Hen. She was greeted with rapture by Biddy, but her own response was ungracious and cold.

"Shure, 'tis yourself is gettin' too fine for the likes av us," observed the Red Hen, her little keen eyes peering out from her shawl at the girl's clouded face. "Not a civil word ivir now, nor a thought av the days whin ye were glad enough av the bit an' sup from Biddy here, the dacint woman. Ah! thin, an' myself too, whin my basket was handy, an' the gingerbread an' bit o' rock under me shawl."

"Come, come, Molly!" exclaimed Biddy. "Don't be vexin' the crathur wid referrin' to thim times. 'Twas herself always had the makin's av a lady in her, an' ye can't go against that any way. Ye'll have a cup av fresh tea, acushla,

won't ye? It's not the lavin's I'd be offerin' ye now. Just wait a moment an' I'll have the kettle boilin' fine."

Kitty looked with extreme annoyance at the old beggar woman, and then drew a chair up near the door for coolness.

"I'll be glad of some, Biddy," she said. "But I came to have a talk with you on some private matters."

"Ah! faix, thin, is it meself that's intrudin'?" exclaimed the Red Hen, bridling visibly. "Quality manners indade, an' saycrets wid the best av thim! Ah! 'tis you have the luck, Kitty; but mark my words, pride will be your worst friend, an' what you most desire will be a curse in the end an' rob yer heart av its pace. 'Tisn't granted wishes that brings happiness—you'll remember what I've said whin the time comes."

She rose as she spoke, with the dignity of the seeress strong upon her.

"Are you goin', Moll woman?" inquired Biddy.

"I am, Biddy avic. There's the widow M'Carthy I'm afther promisin' to see—the poor crathur—'tis brought to bed wid twins she was yesterday, an' her husband not a month in his grave. I dunno how it is wid her at all."

Biddy protested faintly at so brief a visit, but in truth she was anxious to have a talk with Kitty and learn how she liked her new life.

When the Red Hen had taken her departure she brought the girl her tea, and gazed with tender pride at the increased loveliness of face and figure. Kitty wore a white gown that Lady Ellingsworth had given her, and a broad straw hat.

"You're well, acushla?" said Biddy tenderly. "An' happy, I'm sure. 'Tis the grand life for ye, darlin', an' 'tis yourself is just made for it intirely. What was it ye came to tell me about?"

Kitty sipped her tea slowly.

"I—I hardly know what you will say to it, Biddy," she said. "But Lady Ellingsworth thinks I have a very good voice, and she wishes to train it so that I may become a professional singer. To do this I should have to go abroad—to Italy, indeed—and study for at least two years. Then it would be in my own power to become independent, rich, famous. Think of that, Biddy!"—and her eyes kindled. "To live no longer on charity or sufferance—to be before the world, and win its praise and wonder! Oh! doesn't it sound glorious—too good to be true!"

Biddy sank into the nearest chair, her face white as death. "Ah, glory be to God! What's it all about?" she exclaimed. "It's fairly *moithered* me poor head is gettin'. What was it ye said, child? A singer! An' *that'll* make you rich? Shure, 'tis jokin' ye are, mavourneen!"

"Indeed, I am not," said Kitty indignantly. "And Lady Ellingsworth is well able to judge. She used to sing beautifully herself; and she told me that in England or abroad she had never heard a voice like mine—that it would be a wonder for the world. Why should she say so if it was not true—if she did not really think it?"

"Ah, why indeed?" echoed Biddy plaintively, conscious only that the wave of Kitty's luck was bearing her further and further away from the old landmarks. "It seems wonderful, darlin'. I used to say you had a bird in your throat whin you was little; but I've nivir taken much count av it since. Indade, I've not had the chance! But what was it ye said about It'ly, darlin'? Shure, 'tis a mighty long way to be goin' to larn what you knows already."

"I don't know half enough," said Kitty eagerly. "I can sing, of course, but not as real singers do—professionals, I mean—who sing at concerts or in the theatres."

"Theaytres!" exclaimed Biddy. "The saints presarve us, darlin', ye're nivir goin' to appear in thim sort av places at all, at all! Ah, musha, why did I ivir let ye go from me? An' what's Lady Ellingsworth thinkin' of at all? Shure, 'tis only haythin wickedness ye'll be larnin', child—an' in furrin parts there's no knowin' what they'll be doin' to ye. Ah! 'twill break me heart intirely, Kitty asthore. It's drivin' a nail in me coffin ye are wid ivery month ye're away from me. But whin the say's between us, an' ye're in a strange counthry altogether—an' nivir your voice at me ear, nor your eyes smilin' upon me—O Blessed Mother, 'tis dead I'll be intirely!"

The melancholy picture was too much for her. She raised her apron and wiped away tear after tear that rolled down her furrowed cheek.

The sight vexed Kitty, as any display of grief or emotion invariably did.

"Oh! come, Biddy," she said, "what's the use of fretting like that? It's only for my own good that I must go away, and Lady Ellingsworth knows it. Besides, I want to be independent. I owe everything to charity. I'll do so no

longer ; and when I can earn my own living, Biddy, I'll have you to live with me, and you shall never work any more."

"Ah ! the blessings of Heaven on ye, child. 'Tis you have the good heart, for all ye seem so proud and wilful ; and indade, asthore, what's best for you is known to yourself, though it breaks me heart to think of what ye may have to suffer in a strange land. O Blessed Mother, may sorrow and sickness nivir come nigh you when you'll be far from thim that loves you !"

She rocked herself to and fro, distracted by the melancholy picture her imagination had conjured up, and Kitty felt a momentary twinge of conscience at the memory of this long-suffering and patient love she had so little regarded.

She sat there silent, knowing from experience that grief, when violent, is often short-lived in the Irish heart. Soon Biddy ceased to weep, and looked up at the fair young face by the doorway, the evening light on its delicate bloom, and a certain melancholy subduing its petulance.

"And whin are ye laving us, *cushla ma chree* ?" * she asked at length.

"Oh, not till the autumn," said Kitty. "Lady Ellingsworth is coming with me, so you need have no fear but that I shall be well placed. I think she knows some people in Milan—that's the name of the town in Italy, Biddy—and will leave me with them as a boarder. I shall have to study hard, but I don't mind that."

"Shure, darlin', what study did it nade to teach ye to wile the heart out of us wid 'Little Mary Cassidy,' or 'Shule Agra,' or 'The Wearin' o' the Green' ? Will all your foreign tunes and foreign words bate thim ould songs av Ireland ?"

Kitty smiled. "Ah, but, Biddy, Ireland isn't the whole world, and what pleases us won't please other people. And there's quite as beautiful music as ours in other countries ; when I come back——"

She stopped abruptly, for a shadow darkened the doorway, and to her annoyance she saw Johanna Reardon standing there.

"God save all here, and a fine good-evening to ye," exclaimed the Swan. "Is that yourself, Kitty ? It's quite the stranger ye are here, more espaciously since the lady has taken ye up, though don't be above takin' a hint that consanguinity

* Pulse of my heart.

is by no manes self-deceptive, and I've found raysons for sayin' that same. But wid yer lave, Biddy woman, I'll just come in and rest meself, for 'tis a long tramp I've come this blessed day."

"Come in and kindly welcome," said Biddy, rising and bringing forward a chair. "'Tis long since I've had sight av ye, woman. Where have ye been at all?"

"Oh, travelin' about, Biddy, passin' the time with some of me relashuns" (this was a polite fiction on the part of Johanna, by which she often accounted for little disappearances with which the law had something to do). "But I've been back agin as you see," she went on, "and I thought I'd just be givin' you *ocular* demonstrashun that I was alive. And how's all wid ye, Biddy woman, and Jim, how's himself?"

"Ah! bad cess to him, he's just as ivir he was," said Biddy. "There's a dhrop o' tay in the pot, Johanna, and there's whisky in the cupboard; you'll have a taste for good luck?"

Kitty rose abruptly. These homely hospitalities did not interest her.

"I must be getting home now, Biddy," she said. "It's a long walk, and I promised Lady Ellingsworth to be back before dark."

"Well, there's an escort ready for ye anyways," observed the Swan. "For 'twas meself saw young Misther Moira, the new agint, as they call him now, loitering about the village, and 'twas himself axed me if I'd seen you goin' back by the borean, so 'twasn't hard to make deductions, by rayson of which same he's waitin' for ye out beyont, and ye'll not have to fear the dark or the loneliness either."

Kitty colored warmly as she met Biddy's surprised glance. She had not spoken of the young agent, nor had the Dalin' Woman learnt of his arrival yet.

"I am sure," she said haughtily, "that Mr. Moira is not waiting for *me*. You are quite mistaken, Johanna."

"He's put up the side car, anyways," said Johanna. "(Thank ye kindly, Biddy, a sup o' the crathur wouldn't be at all unacceptable in my fataygued condition.) And if ye go down the street, Kitty, ye'll be havin' cognizance of his prisince before ye've got the length of Shaun M'Carthy's shop. 'Tisn't a word av a lie I'm tellin' ye, child, so ye needn't look so indignashious at me."

“Good-bye, Biddy,” said the girl quietly.

The red spot of indignation still burnt in either cheek. Her pretty mouth was closed in a scornful line.

“Ah, now, child, don’t ye be goin’; shure, ’tis a mighty short time ye’ve been here. Why wid ye be mindin’ Johanna’s jokes at all, at all? Shure, ’tis she has the foolish tongue as we all know. And who is Mr. Moira, darlin’? Not a word have I had wid you this blessed day, only hearin’ that you’re lavin’ us——”

“Lavin’! What’s that at all?” exclaimed the Swan. “Kitty lavin’ us. Well, glory be to God, that’s news for me, Biddy woman! Where’s she goin’ to?”

But Kitty pressed a hurried kiss on Biddy’s disturbed face and fled.

The Dalin’ Woman went to the door, and stood watching the graceful figure till a turn in the street hid it from view.

Then she sighed heavily and returned to her friend, who was making herself extremely comfortable with the help of the whisky bottle.

“Come, take a sup yourself, Biddy woman,” said Johanna. “Shure, you’re not yourself at all. There’s a hypochondriacal look about ye that spakes av an onaisy mind. Is it frettin’ ye are on account of the child? And she just the very *epitomy* of ingratitude. Divil a bit she cares for any one savin’ her own self, and that will always stand first with Kitty, as thrue as the sun to the dial. Don’t I remimber her a bit av a brat wid vanity and consate looking out av the tail av her eye, if so be she’d a new gown or a bit of ribbon to flaunt afore the children? That’s thrue for ye, now, and it’s not the better she’s gettin’ wid bein’ cockered up by education and book-larnin’ as is only fit for the quality itself.”

“Don’t ye be after runnin’ her down, Johanna,” said Biddy, “the child’s worth all that’s bein’ done for her. She’s as beautiful to look at as Lady Ellingsworth herself, and no one can say but she’s clever, and has the manners av the rale gentry. And now she’s afther tellin’ me they’re sending her to Italy to larn to sing like thim gran’ ladies we’ve heard of that has to go before quanes and emperors.”

“What’s that ye’re sayin’?” exclaimed the Swan incredulously. “Kitty goin’ to furrin countries—and to learn to sing? Is it like Catherine Hayes they mane—the *cantytracy* of Ireland? Shure, haven’t I seen the picture of her wid my own two eyes, in a satin gown, and wid pearls as big as

pigeons' eggs round her neck? Ah! shure, 'tis jokin' ye are, woman. Kitty's got the swate voice sure enough, and 'tis she could turn a tune wid any one, but to take to professhional vocalization, and singin' to lords and ladies, why, 'tis only laughin' at her they'd be!"

"Ah! indade thin, Johanna Reardon, 'tis yourself don't know ivirything, for 'tis Lady Ellingsworth herself as says that Kitty's voice is the wonderful one, and a mine of gould to her whin once she can sing thim furrin songs, though 'twill go hard to bate her wid the tunes av her own counthry."

"Well, well, glory be to God! and who'd have thought it now? and me listenin' to her givin' the Irish o' the 'Shan van Voght,' not to spake av 'Silent, O Moyle,' and hapes av others," said the Swan amazedly. "And nivir thinkin' that her voice was anythin' to be supercilious about! Faix, no wondher she's houldin' her head so high and lookin' down on the likes av us. Sorra a bit would I belayve it save from your own lips, Biddy Maguire!"

She helped herself to another sup of whisky on the strength of the startling communication, and the remainder of her visit was spent in ejaculations of mingled wonder and envy.

Biddy listened and said little. With all her pride and delight in Kitty's good fortune there mingled a sorrowful foreboding. The shadow of that parting so soon to fall upon her life had already thrown its mysterious influence around her.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THERE was no possibility of avoiding Laurence Moira, so Kitty walked down the long straggling street till she came to the shop door by which he was standing.

He lifted his hat as she approached. "I thought I should meet you," he said frankly. "May I give you a seat back? I had to come into the village to make some purchases, and I heard from Lady Ellingsworth that you were there."

Kitty hesitated a moment. She did not wish to be under any obligation to the young man, but on the other hand the way was long and dusty, and she was somewhat tired.

"Lady Ellingsworth has asked me to dine there to-night," went on Laurence Moira, "so please don't look so doubtful. I really should feel it on my conscience to know you were tramping these four miles of dusty road all by yourself."

"I am used to that," said Kitty quietly. "Still, I don't mind confessing I shall be glad of a lift, for I am rather tired. It was so hot walking here this afternoon."

He assisted her into the high vehicle and they drove off. The girl felt in every tingling nerve that her action and her escort were being criticised and commented on by the idlers they passed, and the acquaintances who gave them greeting.

Her anger flamed out at last. "Oh! how I hate these Irish!" she exclaimed. "They make every one's business their own, and not the smallest or most insignificant action escapes their comment. If only I were rich and independent nothing should induce me to live in Ireland."

Young Moira checked the horse to walking pace, and looked at her in unfeigned surprise.

"They mean no harm," he said. "It is only a kindly interest after all. Better surely than the stolid indifference of the English."

"I don't agree with you," she said haughtily. "To me it appears nothing short of impertinence. Irish humor seems always to have an element of coarseness in it; and that peculiar good nature and frankness which is so much commended is only an excuse for insolent personality and rough banter."

"You are hard on your countrymen," said young Moira, with a sudden remembrance of the girl's own origin. "Granting that their wit and jests are of a somewhat personal nature, at least no one who knows them can affirm that they lack delicacy of feeling, as well as kindness of heart."

"Oh! I see you have all Lady Ellingsworth's prejudices," said Kitty scornfully. "For my part, I have my own experience to fall back upon, and I do not agree with either of you. They are as keenly alive to their own interests as any other nation, and have tenfold the vanity, superstition, and ignorance of the English."

"I am sorry to hear you say that. Of course we are no more exempt from faults and weakness than other people and other races, but I do maintain that we have ample excuse for the one, and deserve more pity than blame for the other."

"By which you mean whisky and tradition. They have been the bane of the Irish nation ever since it had a history at all."

He laughed. "You hit hard, Miss Maguire," he said.

He saw the blood flame scarlet in her cheek.

"I wish," she said, "you would not call me *that*. It is not my name. I—I have no name. Surely you know that. I cannot suppose any one at Mount Moira or Knockrea would have left you in ignorance of the fact all this time."

He looked slightly embarrassed. "Indeed you are wrong," he said. "All I know of you was learnt from a slight explanation of Lady Ellingsworth's, and she certainly gave me to understand that Maguire was your name."

"It is not, then," she said in a low concentrated voice, "and I am glad you know it. I don't know who I am, and the gift of my existence is not one for which I am particularly grateful."

He was silent a moment. He scarcely knew how to take so embarrassing a confession. He touched his horse with the whip and it trotted rapidly along. The sun was setting over the distant mountain peaks; the warm air blew softly by, scented with hay from the stacks, or the wild flowers in the hedges. Here and there the smoke from some cabin fire floated like a white film above the green of fields, or the sudden dip of a valley.

Kitty looked at it all with sombre eyes. She had no love for this land of her birth, and saw little beauty in its loveliness.

Presently her companion spoke again.

"There was no need," he said, "for you to have told me this. I am too liberal-minded to blame a child for the sins of the parents. It makes no difference to me what you are, seeing that it is from no fault of your own. If men were less hard on women, and women less lenient to men, I fancy there would be fewer sins and less shame to account for."

Kitty looked at him in surprise. Her face softened visibly. "Ah!" she said, "there are not many people who think as you do. As for me, all my life I have been despised—mocked at—for what you say was no fault of my own. Is it any wonder that I long to get away from here, from every one who can point the finger of scorn at me? that I crave for independence and work, for the day when I need no longer eat the bread of charity and accept patronage?"

Her face flushed, her brilliant eyes looked all the scorn and longing of her passionate young soul.

He gazed at her with new interest. That glimpse of wild untamed nature pleased him more than any orthodox young ladyhood.

"That day," he said, "will certainly come. You see, I was a true prophet. I felt certain Lady Ellingsworth would agree that your vocation lay in a very different direction to secretarship. I believe you are to go to Italy and study, are you not?"

"Yes," she said. "Somehow I feel as if I ought to thank you for all this. I might never have known my own possibilities but for you."

"Oh! nonsense," he said. "Nature tells us what we can do. We can never hide what is in us, if it is of any worth. I shall watch your career with keen interest. I think, judging from my short experience, that you will never be content with passivity. You are cast in a restless mould. Strife of soul, and mind, and temper looks out of every line of your face."

She laughed softly. "Indeed, I think you are right. I have never known content. I have always wanted to do something or be something ever since I could remember. Oh! what was that?"

The horse had suddenly shied, and she was jerked almost out of her seat.

Moir's strong wrist checked the animal, and he turned round to look at a slouching figure that suddenly lurched forward from the shadowy hedge.

"What did you do that for?" cried the young man angrily. "Couldn't you hear us coming along?"

Kitty recognized the man instantly. He was Jim Maguire, and as usual three parts intoxicated.

"Hear you, was it?" he answered sulkily. "And what if I did? The sorra a bit more right to the road you're afther havin' than meself. And by all the books that nivir was opened or shut 'twas your own fault intirely. Drivin' along wid a loose rein the like o' that, and makin' love to the colleen beside ye instead of minding where ye're drivin' to. Oh, bedad, and if it isn't Kitty herself! 'Tis you're gettin' up in the world, child, and small blame to ye! Won't your honor give me the price av a glass to drink your healths? 'Twas meself had the trainin' and bringin' up av her, and begorra but she was the handful av wilfulness."

"Here's a shilling for you, and get out of my way," exclaimed Lāurence Moira impatiently, "and a word of advice. Don't spend it on drink, my good man. You've had as much as is good for you already. What's that you thrust in the hedge?" he added, looking keenly down from his high seat. "A gun, is it?"

"A gun, your honor? Divil a bit av a gun have I seen or handled this many a day! 'Twas only my blackthorn as I was swingin' around, and thinking av a bit av a shindy I'm afther havin' wid Jack Callaghan up by way av Lazy Corner yonder. Bedad, 'twas meself gave him the souse in the pool just to cool his blood a bit."

"Come, come," said young Moira sternly, "you're very free with your tongue, but I'm sure I saw the flash of a barrel in your hand, and I want to know what you're going to do with it. You haven't a gun license, I suppose?"

"Ah thin, swate bad luck to ye, interfarin' wid an honest man's amusements," muttered Jim angrily. "'Tis nothing at all I'm goin' to do wid it, seeing there's not a charge that 'ud hurt a tom-tit in the barrel. And it's not mine at all, more by rayson of Jack Callaghan havin' given me the loan av it to git the lock mended for him in the village."

"Then why did you lie about it?" asked Moira.

"Lie, is it? Shure, your honor knows an Irishman better than to belayve him whin it's his own business he's asked to explain."

"Never mind him, Mr. Moira," said Kitty impatiently.

"He'll keep you talking all night, and then you'll learn nothing."

A lengthy experience of Erin's sons having long since proved the probability of this statement, the young man took her advice and left Jim standing there in the roadway, looking after them while they drove on in the falling dusk.

"Ah, bad cess to ye, ye lazy trollop, you!" muttered Jim, "wid your high-flown Englified talk and your scornful ways. It's not 'gran'father' now. No, faix, and your head held up wid the best av thim! And nivir doin' a hand's turn that ye can help. I wish I could send ye gallopin' down the road to hell along wid the brood ye come from. It's not the will that's been wanting this many a day."

He turned and took out the gun that had been thrust into the hedge.

"Ah! may the divil blind the eye of ye. A short coorse to ye, and that's what I'm wishin'," he went on angrily, "wid your 'what's that?' and 'who's gun is it?' Who's gun should it be but me own? and a tidy bit av sport it's afther whin the divil sends the chance."

He looked with stupid fondness at the weapon.

"There's thim as would give a good dale to know about you," he went on as he stepped forward along the dark road. "'Tis fine and saycret I've kept ye this long time, and neither friend nor foe got word av it—not even Biddy herself. Ah! the divil's luck to ye, what made me be takin' you out to-night at all, and the sharp eye av the young agint to git sight ov ye, av all payple? And what's the use av a lie whin 'tis a blunderin' one? Faix, he's only got to ax Jack Callaghan himself to know the divil a bit av a firearm he's got, or ivir had his hand."

Stumbling and muttering he made his way toward the village. The dusk had fallen rapidly. The moon was but a faint pale sickle in the faint blue of the sky, the air was strangely still.

He stood where the borean terminated and held a sort of tipsy counsel with himself, in which the gun seemed to play an important part.

"I'm tired of waitin'," he went on, "and tired of axin' justice. And now, wid his precaushions and his fears, there's nivir a sight av him to be had."

He took out the coin that the young agent had given him and regarded it with owl-like gravity.

“Begorra ! I’ve a mind to toss up for the chance av it,” he muttered.

He laid the gun down and then spun the shilling into the air and covered it with the palm of his left hand as he caught it in his right.

“Tails and I go,” he said as he lurched up against a tree for support. Then he laughed foolishly and looked down at the coin as it lay in his dirty palm. A strange light flashed into his eyes.

“Tails ! by the livin’ God !” he whispered hoarsely. “Now, Mr. Philip Marsden, you’ve got to reckon wid me onst for all, and by the holy father, ’twill be the *last* time for one av us !”

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"WHO was that man?" asked Laurence Moira as they sped along once more.

"Jim Maguire, the husband of the woman who brought me up," said Kitty. "He's an idle, drunken creature, and a sore trial to poor Biddy."

"I don't like the look of him, I must confess," said Moira. "And what could he have been skulking in the hedge for with that gun?"

"Perhaps a little bit of poaching," said Kitty. "Not that he's much chance on the Knockrea land, for Mr. Marsden keeps his preserves very strictly."

"What a strange man he is," observed Moira. "So reserved and inhospitable. It's no wonder he is unpopular. I must say, however, I have always admired the way in which he has managed his tenants and looked after the property. It was in a miserable condition when he first succeeded to it."

"Succeeded?" echoed Kitty. "I—I thought it came to him through his wife."

"Oh! there's a bit of mystery about that. I never quite got at the rights of it. My uncle had one story and my father another. However, one thing is certain, Mr. Marsden worked marvels once he took things into his own hands. I am the more surprised because he is in a way on alien ground, and Irish tenants are so difficult to manage. They always consider themselves oppressed if concessions are not made, and the more idle and indolent they are, the more they require at the hands of their landlords."

"I thought you considered the Irish perfect," said Kitty.

"By no means. They have many good qualities, but they are by no means exempt from faults, and very bad ones sometimes. I only maintain that they are not entirely to blame, especially the lower classes, who have been badly educated, badly influenced, and whose ignorance and folly have led them into crime at the secret instigation of priestly or political parties."

"I would be anything on earth sooner than an Irish landlord," said Kitty with some bitterness.

"That is only because you do not understand how to deal with an Irish tenant," said young Moira. "The other day I went with Lady Ellingsworth to Micky Corrigan's farm. The land was in fairly good cultivation, but late as it was, he had not troubled himself to stack the corn, and it was almost 'drop ripe,' as they call it. He has about fourteen acres, and works it himself when he feels inclined, and has paid no rent for four years. Well, I told him that it was a shame an Irishman should be beaten by an Englishman, and that at Knockrea the harvest was in safe and sound and nothing to fear from a break in the weather. It put him on his mettle amazingly. The very next day he had got a neighbor or two to help, and when I rode over this morning there it was all built, and Micky himself as proud as a peacock surveying his handiwork. What was more wonderful still, he was as sober as a judge. I'm in hopes I'll get these arrears out of him before I be done."

Kitty glanced with reluctant admiration at the handsome, determined young face. He was decidedly "masterful," she felt, and had a way with him that was hard to resist. She scarcely wondered that he had conquered the recalcitrant Micky Corrigan.

"You are evidently cut out for an agent," she said with a smile; "but do you really like it?"

"Yes," he said, "I do. I have long made a study of the people and their ways, and to me they are always interesting, even when most unreasonable. If I had been in my uncle's position I should have gone into Parliament. I can't understand how he could have allowed his affairs to get into the state they were when Lady Ellingsworth took Mount Moira. He owes her a debt of eternal gratitude, and most of the people adore her."

"Yes, she is very generous," said Kitty coldly.

That innate jealousy of the beautiful woman she had always secretly envied, prevented any warmer expression than this bare acknowledgment of an obvious fact.

Young Moira noted her restraint with some surprise, but he made no further remark upon it, and for some time silence reigned between them. Both were busy with their own thoughts as the light vehicle rolled swiftly along in the gathering gloom.

"How dark it is growing," suddenly exclaimed Kitty. "I am afraid there will be a storm to-night,"

He glanced up at the sky. Dark clouds had gathered in the west, and that ominous stillness so often the prelude to a storm seemed to hold earth and air in silent expectation.

"You are right," he said. "The rain will be upon us directly. Ah, there's the first flash! It's a good thing we are so near the house."

They turned into the drive as he spoke, and he quickened the horse's speed with a touch of the whip. "Why, there's Lady Ellingsworth!" he exclaimed suddenly, as his eyes fell on a figure walking swiftly before them.

"So it is," said Kitty. "And there's the thunder!" she added, as a low rolling peal broke the stillness around.

Laurence Moira checked his horse by Lady Ellingsworth's side. Kitty knew of course that she must dismount and give up her place, even before Hermia's glance suggested it.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she exclaimed. "I have a horror of thunderstorms. Kitty child, I'm sorry there's no room, but if you hurry, you'll escape, I think. Have you a wrap or umbrella?"

"Oh, don't trouble about me," said the girl brusquely. "I shall not hurt."

They exchanged places, and she watched the dogcart drive off with a sense of bitter, burning resentment.

"Always the dust for me, the throne for her!" she muttered. "Oh! will the day ever come when I shall meet her on equal ground—not poor and rich, but woman to woman?"

She stood there under the arching boughs; the rain began to fall in heavy plashing drops. She lifted her face, and their cool touch seemed to rebuke its angry fever. The thunder pealed out again. Its fierce note found an echo in her own fierce mood. What did they care for her, these two, who had flashed out of sight? What did any one care for her, her comfort, or peace, or happiness, save, indeed,—Biddy? and of Biddy she felt ashamed and impatient, and half resentful by reason of her own ingratitude.

The lurid lightning, the pealing thunder, the falling rain, seemed to her symbolic of herself, and that chaotic, restless nature of hers, for ever turbulent, for ever unsatisfied.

She felt that she hated every one and everything to-night. Above all, she hated the gracious lovely woman whose every word and look meant patronage and superiority.

"But it won't be for always," she muttered. "It *shan't* be; and then——"

A blinding flash of light cut short her words, and for a moment brought her a sense of her own danger. Yet still she lingered under the trees, her moody eyes watching the sinister glow in the west, all her wild nature attuned to the wild tumult of the elements.

The wind arose, and the rooks in the elm boughs burst into an uneasy chorus. One terrific crash of thunder rent the heavens, and the attendant lightning flashed from space to space. Then like a torrent set free from mountain height the rain swept down in one massive sheet that penetrated the screening branches, and turned the avenue into a running river.

In a few moments the girl was soaked to the skin. Yet still she stood in the same place, utterly indifferent to risk or discomfort, only intent on watching the disordered elements work their will, and rejoicing in some dim savage fashion in the discord around her.

Suddenly a furious gust of wind tore through the close ranged trees, snapping off boughs and twigs as if they were leaves. Kitty was conscious of a crash, a blow, and then a sudden darkness.

One falling bough had struck her on the temples, and stretched her stunned and bleeding on the soaked grass below.

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Lady Ellingsworth sat in the drawing-room at Mount Moira shivering with nervous terror as the wild fury of the storm raged without, and the roar of the thunder seemed to shake the very walls around her.

Dinner had been countermanded, and the servants were huddled together in a frightened crowd, filling the hall with pious ejaculations, and crossing themselves at every flash of lightning that swept the circling heavens.

Laurence Moira alone stood unmoved and calm, watching the ravaged sky and the pelting rain, and marveling as each turbulent moment passed, whether Kitty had yet reached the shelter of the house.

He strained his eyes to catch the flutter of a white skirt coming up the avenue, but as yet he had seen nothing. As the storm grew fiercer he became really uneasy.

He turned to his white and shivering hostess.

"Lady Ellingsworth," he said, "I am really afraid that

Miss Maguire has been caught in the storm. If she is sheltering under the trees it is positively dangerous."

Hermia lifted her pale face. "What can we do?" she said. "I doubt if any of the servants would go out if I asked them. Besides, no waterproof or umbrella would be of any use in rain like this."

"That's true," he said gravely. "Still it seems a shame to have left her to face it. I wish she were in some shelter."

"She is probably in the summer house," said Lady Ellingsworth. "She had plenty of time to reach it. Indeed, she might have got to the house before the full force of the storm broke over us, had she hurried as I told her."

She was not too well pleased at the young man's concern. Besides, Kitty was not so delicate or sensitive a creature that exposure to the elements should hurt her!

He returned to the window and maintained his watch until gradually the rain lessened, the peals died away into sullen mutterings, and the lightning ceased to illumine the black and starless sky.

Then Lady Ellingsworth rose, and rang for lights and the delayed dinner.

"Kitty must have come in long ago," she said. "I dare say she is in her room changing her dress."

Moira longed to hear her ask the footman to ascertain this point, but she did not do so when she gave him her orders, and the young man did not like to press the matter on her notice again.

Lady Ellingsworth's indifference was really only the outcome of her own certainty that the girl was safe in some shelter, and would be in the drawing-room awaiting them when dinner was over.

She chatted pleasantly to the young agent, and learnt of Micky Corrigan's amendment, and discussed the faults and virtues of other tenants, and learnt that the parish priest had given out his intention of holding a "station" * at the cabin of a certain recalcitrant parishioner who for four years had absented himself from mass and confession.

When at last Lady Ellingsworth rose, it was nearly half-past nine o'clock. She went into the drawing-room, leaving Lau-

* Holding a "station" means that the priest and his curate intend coming to some house in the neighborhood on a day publicly announced from the altar and there hearing confessions. It is done to give negligent parishioners an opportunity of *coming to their duty*.

rence Moira to the claret and cigars, and glanced round expecting to see Kitty there. No one was visible. For the first time the thought crossed Hermia's mind that she ought to have inquired for the girl's safe return.

She rang the bell and questioned the footman. He had seen or heard nothing of Kitty. Then she bade him send one of the women to her bedroom to ascertain if she were there.

After some moments' delay word was brought back that the girl was not in her room; neither had any one in the house seen her since luncheon time.

Lady Ellingsworth began to feel uneasy. She bade the man take a lantern and go down the avenue as far as the spot where she had last seen Kitty, also to look in the summer house for fear she might have met with any accident.

It seemed to her very strange that Kitty had not returned. There would have been ample time for her to have reached the house had she hastened immediately after the dogcart.

The full fury of the storm had not burst forth for quite a quarter of an hour after they had driven off.

Time went on, and her uneasiness increased. It was a relief when Laurence Moira at last entered the room, and she could tell him of her fears and anxieties.

He at once offered to help in the search, but to this she would not agree.

"Two of the men have gone to look for her," she said. "Surely that is enough. I fancy she must have taken refuge in the summer house, though I cannot imagine what has delayed her all this time."

They moved along the long shadowy room, and went over to the window, and stood looking out at the wet lawn, the little hurrying runnels on the pathway, the soft gleam of moonlight in the now cloudless sky. In both minds there reigned a sense of uneasiness, not keen enough for expression, though capable of disturbing them both.

Laurence Moira was wishing he had dismounted and given Lady Ellingsworth the reins. Only the fact of the horse's nervous and excitable condition since it had shied on the road, had prevented his suggesting this.

Meanwhile, the moments passed slowly, and ten o'clock chimed from the timepiece on the mantelpiece. Then it was that the gleam of a light wavering unsteadily in the distance caught young Moira's eyes.

"They are coming at last," he said, and he vaulted out

through the open window on to the terrace, and strained his eyes to see if the girl's figure was visible.

It seemed to him that the men were carrying something, and his long-quieted anxiety leaped into sudden fear. Without a word to Lady Ellingsworth, he hastened down the gravel path and reached the avenue.

He saw his fears were realized. The men were supporting between them a dripping figure, the loosened hair falling in wild disorder about the white and blood-stained face.

He hurried forward with a cry of alarm.

"We found her under the trees, sir, with a great bough lying on the top of her," said one of the footmen. "'Twas quite cold and without a breath of life in her she seemed."

Laurence looked at the semiconscious girl, and his heart smote him with terrible reproach. Why had he left her at all, and why—oh! why had he not followed his instincts and gone in search of her hours ago?

He took her in his arms, and bade one of the men hurry off for the doctor while he carried her into the house.

Lady Ellingsworth met them in the hall, and in a few curt words he told her of the accident.

"She must have been stunned," he said. "And all these hours she has lain there on the wet grass, helpless and unconscious. Get her to bed at once. I should advise a hot bath if she recovers her senses. I took the liberty of sending off one of the men for the doctor."

"You did quite right," exclaimed Hermia in great distress. "Poor child, poor girl! How can I ever forgive myself? How I wish I had sent out after her while we were at dinner!"

Kitty opened her eyes and gazed languidly about her. Then a violent fit of shivering shook her slight frame, and Laurence, in great alarm, half led, half carried her up the stairs to her own room, and there left her in charge of Lady Ellingsworth and the women servants.

It was nearly an hour before Dr. Carrick arrived, and by that time the girl was in bed, fits of shivering alternating with burning heat, as she tossed restlessly on her pillows.

The doctor looked very grave when he heard of the accident, and long exposure to the wet and cold.

"It will be a marvel if she escapes rheumatic fever," he said, as he examined the wound on her temples and noted her flushed face and hurried breathing. "How was it no one noticed her absence, Hermia?" he went on.

Lady Ellingsworth flushed guiltily. "I thought she would have run home long before the storm burst," she said; "and then in my own nervousness I quite forgot her. She does not always dine with me, and I fully expected to find her in the drawing-room when I went in after dinner. Of course then I began to fear some accident must have happened, and despatched messengers to search for her. They found her under one of the trees in the avenue in this condition."

Dr. Carrick shook his head with professional caution.

"We can do no more to-night," he said. "I will give her a soothing draught, and if she can sleep and the fever does not increase, her youth and good constitution may triumph. But I hardly expect she will escape complications of some sort."

Long before morning his fears were realized, and Kitty lay in the hopeless grasp of rheumatic fever.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

It was scarcely six o'clock when Hermia rose, after a restless, disturbed night, and took her way to Kitty's room.

The woman who had sat up with her, gave a very unfavorable report of her condition, and Hermia saw that the girl was really alarmingly ill. She dismissed the woman to get some sleep, and then took her place in the sick room.

The sun was shining brightly in through the drawn blinds. She went over to the window and threw it open to admit air and sunlight. As she looked out she saw a man riding rapidly up the avenue toward the house.

Wondering what messenger was speeding thither so early in the day, she remained standing at the window to see if he came to the principal entrance.

Her heart stood still with momentary fear. She felt that this early visitor was the bearer of bad tidings.

It seemed a long time before a note was brought to her by one of the housemaids, and one glance at the girl's pale, frightened face told her that she had heard the news, whatever it was.

The note was in Dr. Carrick's handwriting. She tore it open and read in a few guarded words that he had been summoned to her father at daybreak. He had met with an accident, and it was advisable that she should come over to Knockrea with all possible speed.

Hermia glanced from the written message to the girl's frightened face.

"Who brought this?" she asked.

"If ye plaze, me lady, 'twas Andy the coachman's son. An' I was to tell you to haste all ye could, me lady, for the gintleman is in a bad way, an' the docthor daren't lave him."

Hermia asked no more, but went to her room and dressed herself with all possible speed, and ordered the dogcart to be brought round at once. Then, leaving orders as to which of the servants were to stay with Kitty, she drove swiftly off to Knockrea.

"An accident"—so Doctor Carrick had said. She mar-

veled what sort of accident it could be. Surely there had been no other attempt on his life!

It seemed an eternity till the light vehicle whirled her through the big open gates and up to the well-known entrance. As she got down at the hall door she saw Dr. Carrick waiting for her. His grave face was a preparation for his words.

"It is too late," he said. "He died just ten minutes ago. Come in here, my dear, and I will tell you all about it."

Pale and trembling, she followed him into the dining-room and sank into a chair.

"It was a repetition of that other attempt," he said. "But this time the fellow has been caught. He was too drunk to escape, but not too drunk to bungle his work. Your father was shot through the back as he sat at his table in the library last night."

Hermia uttered a faint cry of horror.

"Shot—and who did it?"

"That vagabond and radical, Jim Maguire," answered the doctor. "He was caught stealing out through a gap in the fence with a discharged gun in his hand. One of the keepers caught him. He is lodged in the police station at present, and the inspector will be here again at noon to continue investigations. It is a terrible thing for you, my dear; but take this comfort, that his life was not likely to have been of long continuance—at most, a year or two longer."

"Did he know he was dying—did he ask for me?" said Hermia, lifting her white face to his.

"Yes, he seemed anxious to see you about something; I could not understand what. But he told me his will was in his deed-box, and that he had left a letter of instructions for you, which he trusted to your honor to fulfil. He did not suffer much; but there was nothing to be done when I was summoned. The wound bled inwardly, and he died from exhaustion."

"May I go upstairs now?" asked Hermia rising.

"Of course, if you wish; but wouldn't you rather wait till —till ——"

"No, no!" she said almost wildly. "I should like to see him at once—just as he is. I think his face would tell me what I want to know."

Dr. Carrick looked at her in mild surprise. Then he followed her out of the room and into the death-chamber, where the women of the household were already congregated, wring-

ing their hands and giving vent to noisy outbursts of grief, interlarded with ejaculations as to his state of salvation, and the destiny of his murderer.

As Hermia entered they all retired, with the exception of Mrs. Geoghagan, who was laying pennies on the eyelids of the corpse and murmuring *aves* and *paters* over it to compensate for the absence of priest or death-bed rites, which Philip Marsden had sternly rejected.

"Ah! may the Lord be good to him—may his soul rest in glory! Shure, 'twas he was the kind masther to me, an' 'tis the sad heart I'm carrying this day!" she exclaimed as Hermia approached the bed, and gazed sadly down at the motionless figure and marble-white face.

She stooped and kissed the cold brow, and then sank down beside the bed and buried her face in her hands.

Something in the dignity and self-control of her grief stayed Mrs. Geoghagan's noisy outbursts. She withdrew a short distance and waited silently till Hermia rose.

"Begging yer pardon, me lady," she then said, "but there's the last offices to be seen to, an' 'tis niver wise to delay *thim* too long. If ye'll come back in half an hour 'twill be all dacint an' in order. Your ladyship may trust me for that."

Hermia looked at her sadly and wonderingly. She knew well enough that curious side of the Irish character to which the "corpse" appeals more powerfully than the living personality.

"Pray, do all that is necessary," she said. "And as I shall be here all the morning, will you send a messenger to Biddy Maguire in the village asking her to come and see me?"

"Indade an' I will, my lady; an' thank you for the kind thought. Ah! 'tis a sad blow for her, the dacint woman—an' that thafe o' the wurld to be bringin' the disgrace upon her after all she's put up with these many years! Well, well, 't isn't for the likes of me to be sittin' in judgment on people; but 'twas meself told her she'd repent the day as ivir she took up wid James Maguire—an' now 'tis the gallows he'll have, an' sarve him right too wid his murtherin', thievin', drunken ways. Faith, the dacint strain was niver in that family, though Biddy's good enough in her way, and ——"

But she spoke to empty air, for Lady Ellingsworth had beat a hasty retreat.

She found Dr. Carrick still in the dining-room, and he told

her he had ordered up some tea for her, as he felt sure she had started from home without any breakfast, which was indeed correct. He then asked after Kitty, and promised to drive over and see her, as soon as he had seen Hermia take some food.

She told him of her intention to stay here in order to see Biddy Maguire.

"I think she would like to nurse Kitty," she added. "And if so ——"

"My dear Hermia, what are you saying?" exclaimed the doctor in horrified accents. "You cannot surely intend to have the wife of your father's murderer under your roof, and at such a time. The neighborhood will be scandalized!"

"I don't care for the neighborhood," said Hermia wearily. "I only know that this poor soul is in heavy trouble, and that the trouble will be intensified by hearing of Kitty's illness. Perhaps if she has something to occupy her thoughts and take them away from her husband's disgrace it may ease her burden of sorrow. She loves Kitty devotedly, and the post of tending and nursing her is as much her right as my duty."

"Ah! my dear, you take too lofty a view of these duties and obligations," said the old doctor. "You have long soared out of my reach. I can only admire—I should never dream of following your example. But here is your breakfast. Not another word till you have eaten something and steadied your nerves with a good strong cup of tea."

Hermia did her best to follow his commands, but the food seemed to choke, though the tea revived her. She put strong pressure on herself to avoid bursting into tears. She felt weak and wretched and unstrung by all she had undergone in the last twelve hours—by her broken rest and this last terrible shock.

It was almost a relief when the kindly old doctor drove off and she was left in the darkened house alone with her sorrow. She lay down on the couch and closed her eyes, and tried to think calmly and clearly of this catastrophe and its attending horrors.

It was all so sudden, so unexpected, that she seemed scarcely capable of grasping facts or arranging events in their natural sequence.

Her father murdered—shot down in this dastardly fashion—and by the hand of Jim Maguire!

That fact stood out with a hateful clearness before her, and

she half longed for, half dreaded, the appearance of the Dalin' Woman.

The house was very silent. No one came to disturb her; the doctor had left strict injunctions to that effect. So slowly the moments passed that one hour seemed to her as twenty-four. She rose at length and pushed the disordered hair back from her throbbing temples and began slowly to pace the room. She wished Judith Montessor was with her. She wondered whether the news had traveled yet to her ears.

With a sudden remembrance of the scene of the catastrophe, she resolved to go to the library and see it for herself.

She left the dining-room and crossed the hall, and entered that familiar and favorite refuge of Philip Marsden's.

Nothing had been touched. The shutters were unclosed, as they must have been on the previous night—on the table lay the scattered papers he had been reading. The lamp had burnt itself out, and the bright sunshine seemed mocking the tragic memories for ever to be associated with that overturned chair—that ominous spot upon the carpet.

Slowly Hermia advanced. With a new horror dawning in her eyes she gazed down at those half-dried blood-stains—those scattered papers—that fallen pen across the page of well-known writing—all the signs of that brief tragedy to which Death now lent its terrible significance.

She stood by the great oak writing-table, with its costly appointments, its innumerable drawers and receptacles. How strange it seemed to think that its owner's hand would never again unlock one of those drawers, or rearrange with careful precision the scattered papers.

Mechanically her hand strayed among the loose sheets. They were chiefly notes and remarks as to various farms, accounts due or paid, suggestions as to improvements and their relative expense. She placed them together in a neat pile and then glanced at the drawers. One was half-open and the key, attached to a bunch, was in the lock.

She closed it and was about to relock it when she noted some obstacle that prevented the catch from fastening. Opening the drawer once more, she noted a flimsy sheet of paper lying loosely on the top. She drew it out, and below she saw a sealed packet, addressed to herself in her father's writing. She took it out and held it undecidedly for a moment, wondering whether she ought to open it or not. Then she remembered that after all she was the only heir to her father's property,

and had surely right to exercise her own judgment in the matter.

She closed the drawer, and seated herself in a chair by the table and broke the seal.

The envelope contained a sheet of paper and another envelope, also sealed and directed to herself, with a date subscribed on it, underneath which was written :—

“Not to be opened till the above date, by my daughter, Hermia Ellingsworth. Should she die before the time mentioned, the enclosed letter is to be burnt by her executors or such person or persons as she shall appoint her heir, or heirs.

(Signed) “PHILIP S. MARSDEN.”

Hermia regarded the document with some wonder.

Then her eyes fell on the loose sheet of paper enclosed in the first cover.

It contained some writing in her father's small, fine hand, and she began to read it :—

“Hermia, when I am dead—which I have a presentiment is not a far-off event—I command you to follow the instructions in my last will and testament strictly, and to the letter. However surprised or annoyed you are at the disposition I have made of my property, you may believe I have excellent reasons for what I have done. Those reasons you will find explained in the enclosed letter, which you ARE ON NO ACCOUNT to open before the date mentioned on its cover.”

More and more puzzled at these strange instructions, Hermia replaced the letter in the first envelope, and sat there conjecturing and wondering as to what her father could possibly mean.

At last, however, she gave up puzzling over the enigma. Probably his will would explain all, and that would be made known after the funeral.

She thought of that ceremony and its attendant horrors with a shudder of repugnance. Then she rose and replaced the letters, and locked the drawer.

At the same moment a knock came at the door of the library, and Mrs. Geoghagan entered, accompanied by the superintendent of police. He explained that he had been unavoidably delayed in coming over to the scene of the murder, and then proceeded to make all necessary inquiries and investigations, and draw up the official report.

He seemed to consider that the prerogatives of his office had been interfered with by the attentions rendered to the corpse, and was only pacified by Lady Ellingsworth's reminder that the doctor had been on the spot when the deceased man breathed his last, and would naturally be prepared to give all necessary evidence respecting the nature of the outrage.

The servants were then summoned and examined, a work of time and difficulty, inasmuch as those who knew nothing of the matter had as much to say as those who knew a great deal.

Hermia learnt that Jim Maguire had been arrested by one of the local police as he was making a way through the hedge. The man had at first taken him for a poacher. He was three parts drunk, and in that sublime condition had confessed more than was at all prudent.

However, it saved any further search, for when the report spread that Mr. Marsden's life had again been attempted, the authorities felt that they would not have to seek far for the perpetrator of the crime on this occasion.

Hours passed in this ordeal of investigation, and then the inquiry adjourned itself to the servants' hall for dinner.

Once more silence reigned through the closed and locked rooms, and Hermia felt that she was at liberty to return to Mount Moira, and accordingly ordered the dogcart to be brought round.

The village was all in wild commotion as she drove through, and the sight of the familiar faces reminded her of Biddy Maguire and that she had not obeyed her summons. She ordered the man to stop at the Dalin' Woman's cottage, which he accordingly did with ill-disguised surprise.

The door was wide open, and through it Hermia saw a small crowd of women standing or sitting as the case might be. Their voices filled the air with ejaculations and surmises—wailing and woe.

“Ah! didn't we always know it was himself as would make ye sup sorrow, Biddy woman! The cruel murtherin' blay-guard, bringin' this throuble on yer poor innocent head, an' lavin' ye in yer ould age widout roof or respectability—though divil a bit the worse will any one think av ye, Biddy agra, so don't be blindin' yer poor eyes wid tears, thinkin' av that.”

Into the midst of this consoling and consolatory crowd swept Hermia—her head towering over the bent and wailing

figures—her pale, sad face full of compassion for the poor stricken woman who sat dumbly beside her turf fire, the slow, salt tears streaming down her face—the sense of a heavier trouble than any she had yet known oppressing her heart.

Hermia touched her lightly on the shoulder.

“Biddy,” she said, “I want you to leave here and come to me at Mount Moira. It is not good for you to remain here all alone. Besides, Kitty wants you.”

Biddy started and looked up incredulously.

“God bless yer ladyship; ’tis you have the kind way wid you! But sure I’m best here by me own hearth. Sorra a bit av comfort is there in the livin’ world for me from this hour. ’Tis the black an’ bitter day, me lady, for you too. Shure, ’tis only wonderin’ I am that ye should have a thought or a word for me at all.”

“It is no fault of yours, Biddy; every one knows that,” said Hermia. “Come, promise me you will do what I ask. Kitty is ill—seriously ill. She will need careful nursing, and I am sure you would rather attend her than leave her to strangers.”

Biddy staggered to her feet and look helplessly around.

“Ah! wisha, wisha, more throubles and misfortunes! Shure, wasn’t I dramin’ av a magpie last night? an’ I knew it wasn’t for nothing. Kitty ill—is that what ye’re afther sayin’, me lady—an’ will I be goin’ to her, is it? Faith, an’ I will thin—this same blessed night. Just give me an hour to set the place in order; an’ Johanna Reardon there, maybe ’tis herself will stay an’ mind it for me? Ah! may the Lord look down on us! ’Tis we have the misfortunes widout the strength to bear thim. *Alanna machree! alanna machree!* an’ what’ll we do this dark day at all, at all!”

Hermia turned to the Swan, who seemed the most composed and dignified of this sympathizing circle.

“Do persuade her to come,” she said softly, “and cheer her up if you can. The poor soul has indeed a heavy trial before her.”

She slipped some money into Johanna’s palm and turned away, leaving Biddy to the friendly offices and advice of her neighbors, who had seized upon this last bit of news with the eagerness of wondering envy.

Kitty’s good luck was becoming quite a proverb among them; and Kitty in the glories of invalidism, with doctors and

nurses, and all the adjuncts of medicine and food to boot, acquired a fresh importance in their eyes.

They almost forgot Jim and his imminent peril, while impressing upon Biddy the great honor Lady Ellingsworth had done her, and urging her departure without loss of time.

The poor Dalin' Woman was mightily confused. It behoved her to make a change of toilet and also to take some necessary articles of clothing with her, and comments and suggestions were rife as to the wisdom of her selection—the probable length of her stay—and the mysterious suddenness of Kitty's illness.

At last the Swan came to the rescue with a noble assertion of the sacredness of sorrow, and a storm of magnificent expressions that awed the gossipers into silence.

One by one they dropped out of the kitchen and took their ways to their respective domiciles.

The Swan then gave her undivided attention to Biddy's preparations, and displayed a quite extraordinary readiness to take up the new office of caretaker, promising that neither stick nor stone should suffer the most infinitesimal amount of harm during Biddy's absence, and winding up her declarations of loyal friendship by an offer to swear an *alibi* for Jim himself at the forthcoming inquest if his wife thought it an advisable proceeding.

Considering that he had been caught red-handed, so to speak, and had further complicated matters by a partial confession, this offer could only be appreciated by a purely magnanimous mind with no bias in favor of right or probability.

CHAPTER XL.

AND now followed a time of horrors and anxieties for all associated or connected with Knockrea.

The inquest on Philip Marsden could have but one result, and Jim Maguire was committed to take his trial for wilful murder.

Biddy's grief and shame were fortunately rendered less acute by reason of the demands made on her nursing skill. Kitty's illness was severe, though not actually dangerous, and it seemed only right and fitting to the household at Mount Moira that the girl should be attended by her foster-mother, with occasional help from the kind-hearted housemaid who had been given her as attendant by Lady Ellingsworth.

As for Hermia herself, she was quite unable to do more than attend to her father's affairs, and all the complications arising from this sudden tragedy.

After the funeral was over, the lawyer who had come from Dublin asked for an interview with her and then communicated the contents of Philip Marsden's will.

Sheet after sheet of crackling parchment was turned, and the string of legacies, and statements as to disposal of personal property, were conveyed to Hermia's ears in the choice ambiguous phraseology devised by the law to suit some mysterious purpose of its own—quite beyond the exigencies of mere common sense.

Very patiently and quietly she listened until the pith and purport of the document was reached. Then she started ever so slightly and a deep spot of crimson began to burn in her cheek as, puzzled and incredulous, she heard the extraordinary bequest of Philip Marsden :—

“And I give, devise and bequeath all the residue of this my personal estate and all the lands, tenements and hereditaments known as Knockrea, situate in the parish of that name, to Hermia, Lady Ellingsworth, my daughter and only surviving child, in trust for Kitty Maguire—so called—the child adopted and brought up by one Bridget Maguire in this village of Knockrea. The aforesaid Kitty Maguire to enter into full and

absolute possession thereof when she shall have attained the age of twenty-one years."

Hermia sprang to her feet in angry amazement.

"What are you saying? It is preposterous—impossible!" she exclaimed. "Kitty Maguire! That beggar—that village child—why, my father must have been mad when he made such a will!"

The old lawyer shook his head and laid down the document.

"I wish I could agree with you," he said. "For indeed it went sorely against my own inclinations to draw up such a will as this. But he was obdurate. He said he had his own reasons and that you would quite agree with them when you learnt their nature. Myself—I, of course, could only draw one conclusion—the natural, if not the most moral one. Your father had some strong interest in this child. Perhaps he knew who she *really* was—perhaps he had some atonement to make. We cannot tell—human nature is weak. Doubtless he will have explained it all to you, Lady Ellingsworth, in the letter of instructions he has left."

"But that is not to be opened until the date mentioned on the cover," said Hermia. "Probably the date when the girl comes of age and enters into possession."

"It is very hard on you," said the old lawyer. "Very hard; but fortunately you have ample means of your own—or it might be possible to come to some arrangement by which you both should live here, and ——"

Hermia silenced him by an angry gesture.

"Never!" she said. "Do you think it possible that I would accept a favor at the hand of this beggar-girl who has supplanted me? Oh! it is cruel—infamous—to take what was my mother's—what I have been taught and encouraged to look upon as my own—and give it away to this nameless bastard! It ought not to be possible—there should be some means of preventing it."

"Unfortunately there are none," said the lawyer regretfully. "The will is unassailable, and I could not honestly advise you to dispute a single point, much as I regret your position. Of course, there is just the chance that this girl—Kitty Maguire— isn't that her name?—may refuse to take the property, and give it back to you by a deed of gift. You could then allow her a fair and sufficient income for herself and take up your rightful position here at Knockrea. I surmise, of course, that

she has no legitimate interest in the matter—that your father did not contract a secret marriage, and this child is the offspring. Even then, as the younger daughter, she should waive her rights in favor of you.”

“I know nothing about her,” exclaimed Hermia. “Nor can I give any reason for my father’s strange interest in her. She used to run wild about the village—every one thought the Maguires were her grandparents. Suddenly my father took it into his head to send her to an expensive school in England and have her taught to be what she considers a lady.”

She laughed bitterly.

“The girl is at present under my own roof,” she said. “I played into his hands and took her as secretary and companion at his request. Who would have thought I was harboring—not an angel—but an heiress unawares !”

The lawyer put his gold spectacles away into their case, and folded up the obnoxious conveyance of Philip Marsden’s last wishes.

He felt very sorry for Hermia, whom he admired greatly and considered very badly used in the matter, but he could do nothing. His client had been sane and clear-headed enough when he gave him his instructions, and he could but put them into legal shape and form, however ill-advised and vengeful they seemed.

The blow had fallen with cruel force on Hermia. She was utterly unprepared for it. She had never had the faintest suspicion of her father’s intentions, or really supposed that his hints and sarcasms were but the disguise of a merciless purpose—a scheme brooded over and planned with revengeful determination for all these years—and of whose full meaning she was even yet in ignorance.

It was little wonder that shame and indignation ran riot within her during the hours of that day—a day that placed her as an alien in the home of her childhood—that lent a double bitterness to every memory connected with it.

And she had loved it so—she had been so proud of its steadily increasing prosperity—its culture and luxury—its growing importance—its carefully nursed and managed acres.

And to think that this despised outcast—nurtured on the bread of charity—vain, wilful, ungrateful, as she had ever shown herself—that she was to reign here as queen and mistress of it all !

The thought was maddening. She threw herself back into

the chair and pressed her hands against her throbbing temples, and asked herself what she should do.

To live here was impossible any longer. The cruel irony that seemed to leave her as mistress and trustee of what was another person's property seemed but an added insult to the one great indignity her father had put upon her. Her whole nature rose in rebellion against the position. Live on here—manage Kitty's house—Kitty's property—Kitty's servants—and then meekly give all back again in four years' time! Was ever so humiliating a situation contrived? Often as she had felt that her father's regard for her was of a very lukewarm nature—well as she knew the cause he had once had for anger—she yet had never dreamt that he would so humiliate her in the place of her birth—in the eyes of all who had known and loved her so long.

If Philip Marsden could have looked down now on the anguish and humiliation he had wrought in this proud soul, he might certainly have congratulated himself on the success of his scheme.

The voice of the old lawyer broke on her angry and turbulent thoughts at last.

"May I ask," he said, "whether you have decided to remain here as you have the right to do, or if you have any instructions to give me? Your father has an excellent agent, and the property is in a highly creditable condition, but the question is about the house. Who will live here? She—the young lady—or yourself?"

Hermia flushed wrathfully.

"I—certainly not!" she said. "Nothing would induce me to do so. With regard to the young lady, as you call her, Mr. Dillon, she is at present very ill. Too ill even to be told of her good fortune. The best thing will be to shut up the house and leave Mrs. Geoghagan and the butler in charge for the present. Doubtless, Kitty will be only too glad to take up her residence here at the first available moment."

Mr. Dillon rose and replaced the crackling parchment in his letter bag. He was returning to Dublin that evening, and the will had yet to be proved.

"I can only again express my regrets," he said. "It is very hard on you, Lady Ellingsworth, very hard indeed. But there's nothing to be done, and no way out of it unless——"

"There is no *unless*," said Hermia scornfully. "Nothing

would induce me to accept as a favor what I have long looked upon as a right. My father has acted according to his own view of the matter. I am utterly in the dark as to his reasons, and he has chosen to leave me so for years to come. I must accept the situation. There is no more to be done—or said."

The lawyer bowed in grave acquiescence, and then left her. She sat for long at the well-known writing-table, her head leaning on her hands, trying to quell the angry tumult within her breast, to reconcile her wounded pride with the strange position forced upon her.

She knew she would have to explain all to the servants, to hear their wondering comments, to read in their eyes the consuming curiosity which would be the result of her announcement. And then to think of Kitty here! Kitty the mistress of Knockrea! Her very blood boiled as she thought of it again, and pictured the girl's triumph and insolent delight in such an unexpected honor.

Who was this girl? she asked herself. What right had she to this inheritance? Could it be really, after all, that she was her father's child, the offspring of some low amour or concealed marriage?

Even if that were so he had acted very unjustly in giving her the dignities and wealth that should by all laws of right and primogeniture have been Hermia's own.

The more she thought of it the more indignant she became. But she knew it was useless to rebel against the inevitable, and she was far too proud to let the outer world see that she was suffering so keenly at this slight.

Gradually the fever of her thoughts grew calm, she braced her energies to face the ordeal before her, and, rising from the table, she went into the dining-room where the old lawyer was enjoying an excellent bottle of port after an equally excellent luncheon.

"Before you go, Mr. Dillon," she said abruptly, "I think it would be advisable to have all the servants in and explain what has happened. It would come better from you, and then I will give the necessary orders about the house, and arrange who are to remain and who to be discharged."

"Certainly, if you wish," he said, but a little anxiety was in his voice. He had a dislike of "scenes," and he knew something of the capabilities of an Irish household when there is a question of dispensing with services, or altering long-standing arrangements.

"I do wish it," said Hermia firmly. "There is no use in postponing a disagreeable duty."

He sighed resignedly and finished his newly replenished glass with infinite enjoyment. The idea of such splendid wine being at a girl's disposal! he thought. A girl who didn't know Chateau Yquem from shilling claret, and to whom the choice vintages of Spain would probably be unpalatable.

Truly Fate played strange pranks both with fortunes and wine cellars sometimes!

At Hermia's summons the old butler appeared, and received her orders with grave politeness. Evidently the master had not been forgetful of long and faithful services.

In five minutes' time all the establishment were collected in various stages of bashfulness, dignity, tidiness, or expectation, and on their wondering ears fell the extraordinary statement as to the fate of the house and property they had confidently assigned to Lady Ellingsworth.

Proud and calm, without a quiver of lip, or sign of the rage and humiliation within, Hermia stood up by Lawyer Dillon's side as he made the announcement.

Then she looked at the startled eager faces, and stayed the storm of sudden exclamations by a gesture.

"My father had every right to deal with his property as he chose," she said. "And I trust you will render your new mistress as faithful service as you would any member of the family whom you have known so long. With regard to the arrangements necessary in the household, I will let you know in a day or two. It will of course be unnecessary to keep up so large an establishment, and Miss Maguire will not enter into complete possession until she is of age. With regard to your legacies and wages, they will be duly paid by Mr. Dillon. I think that is all I need say, except to thank you all for your long and faithful services to the family and my father in particular. Now you may go. Mrs. Geoghagan, I should like a few words with you alone after Mr. Dillon has left."

Awed into unaccustomed silence by the extraordinary news, no less than by the dignified confession of the speaker, the little crowd filed out of the room to give free vent to their feelings and amazement when the door closed behind them.

It is not to be supposed that they would look calmly upon the usurper, or be satisfied that one who had the lawful rights of birth and blood should be supplanted by a mere nobody like Kitty.

A perfect storm of rage and indignation followed their assembling in the servants' hall. Some declared they would never acknowledge the new mistress. Others, wiser and more self-seeking, declared many things might happen in the interim; what use in raging against the girl who, from all accounts, lay on her death-bed at the present moment?

"And by the same laws of natural contingencies," observed this wiseacre, "won't me lady herself be steppin' into her own rights again, and no 'by your lave' about it!"

However, neither the murder nor the funeral, nor anything else connected with the tragic events of this last week, had so exercised their minds and tongues as this startling announcement that the beggar-brat, the village child, the ragged, nameless urchin they had all known as "Kitty the Rag," was to be the mistress and owner of all this splendid property, and could, in their own parlance, "howld up her head wid the best in the counthry," if not by right of birth, at least by those undeniable rights of beauty, wealth, and position.

CHAPTER XLI.

MRS. GEOGHAGAN was awaiting Hermia in the library, attired in Russell cord and crape, and wearing an expression combined of sympathy and curiosity.

Hermia, however, cut short her attempts at condolence with sharp discouragement. She explained briefly that owing to Kitty's present condition nothing could be decided upon, but that in her own position as executrix and trustee she deemed it advisable to close the house and dismiss the staff of servants, with the exception of housekeeper and butler and one or two helpers.

"But, axin' your pardon, me lady, won't you be comin' to live here in the manetime?" inquired Mrs. Geoghagan. "Isn't it yourself has more right than anybody else to the place belonging to your own mother's family (her sowl to glory), and we all looking upon you as the new mistress av it?"

"That is altogether beside the question," said Hermia coldly. "My father has chosen to act in this manner and we must accept his decision. I thought I would tell you this to-night, as you can then explain it to the servants, and make all the necessary arrangements. . . . This has been a long and trying day for me, and I am very tired. I am returning to Mount Moira almost directly. I hardly fancy that your new mistress will wish to take up her abode here immediately," she added with unconscious sarcasm. "In the first place she is seriously ill. In the next I should fancy she would wish to travel and see something of the world before settling down. But all that is for the future. Now pray don't cry, my good Geoghagan," she added hastily, as she caught sight of a black-bordered handkerchief being raised to a tearful eye. "What is done *is* done, nothing can alter it. I suppose my father had excellent reasons for this disposition of his property, though it has taken me by surprise as much as yourself."

"Ah! indade thin, my lady, I have my own idays about that," said Mrs. Geoghagan; "and mayhap I could throw a light on the same if I chose. But 'twas my own self said to

Biddy Maguire the first day as ivir the child Kitty come here to the house, and 'tis thrue, my lady, as I'm a livin' woman, 'Biddy,' I says, 'there's something benayth all this. Schoolin' and educaytin' the likes av her,' I says; 'what does it all mane?' Ah! and 'twas she had the close tongue in her head, pretendin' she'd no manner of knowledge of the raysons of it all—not that she decayved *me*, my lady, and take my oath 'tis herself could spake the thrue word if she had the mind to do it!"

"Well, well," said Hermia impatiently, "secret or no secret, what does it all matter? I am not going to dispute the will; and by it Kitty becomes mistress of Knockrea House and all the surrounding property. I can but hope she will manage it wisely, or else marry some sensible man who will do that for her. It would be a thousand pities if it lapsed into its old neglected condition."

"Ah! 'tis a sad day, my lady—a sad day for all av us," said the housekeeper mournfully. "And we lookin' forward to welcome you here again. Ah! shure, thunderstorms and earthquakes wasn't in it wid the surprise av us whin Mr. Dillon gave us the information. But shure, my lady, there's more will come av it than we know at prisint; and 'tis Kitty herself (for me tongue wouldn't get round wid 'miss' or 'ma'am' to her, and that's thruth for ye), 'tis she, as I say, will be sorry and shamed for art and part in it all, wheedlin' the masther wid her airs and her ways, actin' the gran' lady here as if she was born to it!"

"That is quite enough of the subject," said Hermia impatiently. "Will you ascertain if the carriage has come round for me? and then I will leave you to shut up the house and dismiss the servants. I shall not return here until it is absolutely necessary; but of course if you require to see me, or are in any doubt, you can send to Mount Moira. The will must be proved before any of the legacies can be paid; but Mr. Dillon will make arrangements about wages, and advance anything for current expenses. And now, good-bye."

She held out her hand, and the old woman seized it and pressed it to her lips with many expressions of affection and sympathy.

Then Hermia dismissed her, and with one last look round the well-known room she left the house, and drove back to Mount Moira.

Bitter indeed were her feelings as she leant back on the cush-

ions, and closed her tired eyes, and gave herself up to the luxury of solitude and her own reflections.

She who loved this place so dearly, who had worked and lived among the people, who was known and beloved far and wide, would now be humiliated in their sight—had been thrust aside as something of no account—that this child of chance might reign in her stead, and give free rein at last to those vanities and ambitions of which she had made no secret!

The more Hermia thought of it, the keener grew her suffering. There was no spot on earth she loved so dearly as this home of her childhood: that fact made doubly bitter the sense of her banishment.

And henceforth she would have no home. Mount Moira was only a temporary resting place, so to speak; her husband's property had all passed into other hands, and Knockrea, which she had always counted upon, despite her father's strange hints at times, was now snatched from her without warning and given to one who had neither right nor interest in it.

Tears of wounded pride and bitter disappointment rolled down her cheeks. She felt at that moment that she almost hated Kitty.

When she reached Mount Moira she went at once to her room; and, giving orders that she was not to be disturbed, she locked the door, and for two hours gave herself up to the free indulgence of grief.

At last she fell asleep from sheer exhaustion, and was only aroused by a soft knocking at the door, and the announcement that dinner was ready and that Mrs. Montessor had come over half an hour before and was waiting to see her.

Hermia rose from the bed where she had thrown herself. She felt sick and languid and utterly unfit for the conventionalities of life. She unlocked the door and bade the maid bring Judith up to her room. "Then come back and help me to dress," she said. "I will only put on a tea-gown, and tell them to send something into the boudoir by way of dinner. I am not going downstairs."

The maid retired, and in a moment or two returned accompanied by Judith Montessor.

She looked at Hermia's pale face and swollen eyes, and wondered if they were due to natural grief only.

"I hope you don't mind my coming in," she said. "I thought you would be lonely. It must have been such a trying day."

Hermia's lips quivered faintly. She wondered what her friend would think when she heard of what the day had brought forth in the way of trial.

She answered her briefly while the maid rearranged her disordered hair, and helped her into a loose tea-gown of soft white silk. Then the two women went into the adjoining boudoir, and Hermia made an effort to swallow a few mouthfuls of food, remembering that she had not broken her fast since morning.

She scarcely spoke while the servant was in the room, and Judith, who knew every look and shade of her friend's beautiful face, began to feel seriously uneasy. She knew that something more than natural grief for her father's loss had so marred and shadowed that beauty; that pain and trouble of no small weight had laid their heavy touch on the troubled brow and feverish restless eyes.

When at last they were alone her anxiety expressed itself. "You are in trouble, dearest, you are suffering," she said.

"Yes, I am," said Hermia briefly. "I have had a great shock, Judith. Of all misfortunes that could have happened to me, the worst and least expected has been my portion. Can you guess what it is?"

"Your father—his affairs, perhaps," hazarded Judith.

"Oh! his affairs are in perfect order," said Hermia. "But he has left everything to—Kitty."

Judith Montessor gave a faint cry of wonder. "To Kitty!" she exclaimed. "Impossible, my dear Hermia."

"It is quite true. I could scarcely believe it at first, but unfortunately there is no doubt left. I am simply a trustee of the property till she is of age. Then she becomes mistress of it all. I have nothing—not even a legacy!"

For a moment Judith was too astounded for speech. "It is most extraordinary, incomprehensible," she said at last. "What can be his reason for acting in such a manner?"

"There is but one conclusion to be drawn," said Hermia scornfully. "The suspicions we have had about his interest in the girl are no doubt correct. She is his child as well as myself, and he has chosen to provide for her and humiliate me for some reason of his own. I believe he explains it in a letter, but I am not at liberty to open that letter until a date fixed. The day when Kitty will be of age, I suppose."

Judith Montessor looked at her in veritable consternation. "It is most extraordinary," she said, "and it is cruelly hard

on you, Hermia. I suppose," she added presently, "Kitty does not know of this?"

"No, she is not in a condition to be told. She was delirious all night again. Dr. Carrick says there is slight congestion of the lungs as well as the fever. Her condition is very serious."

Judith was silent again, following out her own train of thought.

Hermia leant back in her chair, pale and exhausted from the trying ordeal of the day, and for a long time neither of them spoke.

Judith at last broke the silence.

"Hermia," she said, "one person could throw a light on this mystery. Why don't you question her?"

"You mean Biddy Maguire. I have thought of that, but I doubt whether she would tell us the truth."

"I suppose," suggested Judith, "she never had a daughter?"

"No," said Hermia paling suddenly. "Only one son."

"There is certainly a mystery," continued Judith. "Why not call Biddy in and ask her who Kitty really is, and why she adopted her? Perhaps she would tell you, now that all this good fortune has fallen into her lap."

Hermia looked thoughtful. "I wonder if she would," she said. "I have a great mind to ask her."

She considered the point for a short time and then rang the bell.

"Ask Mrs. Maguire if she can come here for a few moments," she said to the servant. "Let Kate O'Shea remain in the sick room while she is absent."

The man retired, and Hermia and Judith Montessor waited in anxious silence till the sound of a step and a timid knock announced Biddy's arrival.

She came into the room looking pale and worn with anxious days and nights, her neat black dress and white cap emphasizing the change in her position, as well as the respect she deemed due to Lady Ellingsworth.

Hermia greeted her with her usual kindness.

"Take a chair, Biddy," she said. "I want to have a talk with you."

Biddy curtsied and obeyed silently. She was always somewhat in awe of Hermia.

"I want you to tell me all you know about Kitty," continued Hermia. "I have good reasons for asking; it is not

curiosity that prompts me. Circumstances have suddenly arisen which induce me to believe that my father must have had a great interest in her. Can you throw any light on the subject? Do you know the circumstances of her birth, or who was her mother?"

Biddy's face grew white as death. She looked at Lady Ellingsworth in utter consternation. "Indade thin, me lady, I *do* know," she said, "but my lips is sealed by a promise. I cannot tell Kitty herself, lave alone you, me lady——"

"Can you answer one question?" said Hermia coldly. "Is she legitimate or not?"

"To the best av my belief, me lady, she is *not*, though her mother was a lady sure enough."

"A lady!" Hermia started, and looked keenly at the old woman. She had been attributing some low amour to her father of which he had been secretly ashamed. To hear that Kitty's mother was not some mere peasant or village beauty who had caught his fancy, was both a shock and a surprise.

"You are sure of this, Biddy?" she went on eagerly.

"Troth and I am, me lady, as sure as that I'm a living soul this day, and more than that I daren't be tellin' ye, for 'twas the solemn oath I took not to betray the saycret till lave was given me, or under sayle of confession."

"Oh! an Irish oath!" exclaimed Hermia scornfully. "Why, Biddy, they're a proverb in the land. There is a moral fitness in all things, but why you should make a secret of Kitty's birth, when it is *now* of the utmost importance I should know who she is, I really cannot imagine."

Biddy was silent. Her withered hands were nervously plaiting her apron, her eyes never looked at her questioner.

"It's sorry I am to seem disobligin', me lady," she said at last. "But it's not in my power to tell ye more; if so be"—and she glanced up hesitatingly—"if his honor hasn't left word behind, or a hint av why he took the interest in the child? Are you sure, me lady, there's not a bit av writin' somewheres?"

"Yes, there is a letter," said Hermia reluctantly, "but I am not to open it till Kitty is of age, and then—well, you may as well know it now as to-morrow, Biddy—*then* she becomes the mistress of Knockrea House and all my father's property."

"Blessed Mother in Heaven! what is it ye're afther sayin', me lady? Shure, it's drammin' I am intirely! Kitty, my

Kitty, the mistress of the big house, and—oh! may the Lord be merciful to us this blessed day, the wrong is to be righted at last."

"The wrong!" exclaimed Hermia angrily. "What wrong do you mean, Biddy? It is I who am wronged by this extraordinary piece of injustice. Perhaps now you will recognize that I have an absolute right to ask who and what this girl is, and why my father has made her his heir—to my discredit."

Biddy rose to her feet. She was trembling like a leaf, and her face looked scared and bewildered.

"Don't ax me, me lady, don't ax me," she said huskily. "'Twould sind me sowl to purgatory, 'twould be a sorry day and hour for your own self whin one wurrd was spoken. Let it rest as his honor wished, and be shure of this, me lady, that if ye knew *who Kitty was* ye'd not be begrudging her the luck that's come to her. . . . Ah! there's the good God above, and He knows what's best for us, glory be to His holy name."

She crossed herself, curtsied low, and then left the room.

Hermia looked at Judith Montessor, who had been a silent witness of the interview.

"You heard," she said. "What is your opinion now?"

"I think," said Judith very gently, "that it is the same as yours, Hermia."

CHAPTER XLII.

THE weary days dragged on, and Hermia saw them go by with a strange and listless indifference. It seemed to her that she had lost all interest in life, all concern in the passage of time, or the events and incidents of the weeks as they drifted by. She saw no one except Judith, or Dr. Carrick. She refused herself even to Laurence Moria. She rarely left the house, and allowed all matters connected with Knockrea to be arranged by the lawyer or agent. Nothing would induce her to go near the place from which she had been so humiliatingly ousted.

Once or twice Mrs. Geoghagan came to her for instructions and directions as to the storage of plate and linen and other articles, but even she could not induce Hermia to give any personal superintendence to these matters.

The big house looked strangely desolate. The rooms were dismantled, the furniture covered, the windows barred and closed. Meanwhile at Mount Moira its prospective owner was in utter unconsciousness of her good fortune, and was slowly fighting her way back to life and convalescence.

Jim Maguire lay in Limerick Jail awaiting his trial, and Biddy, racked by anxiety and tortured by the uncertainty of his fate, still lingered on at Mount Moira in her office of nurse.

It seemed to Hermia that she had never before put in such a period of intense misery, of acknowledged hopelessness, of utter disgust and weariness with life and all appertaining to it. Love had played her false, marriage had been but disappointment and shame. A brief period of freedom had called her better feelings into play and awakened her dormant energies, and then this last most crushing blow had been suddenly dealt, and she found herself unable to face life in the future with either hope or courage. Worst of all, a slow, resentful dislike to Kitty as the author of these misfortunes had begun to work within her heart. Even when the girl hovered between life and death she only felt a passive indifference as to her fate. She only tried to hide with shamed gladness the thought that there still might be *one* way out of the nightmare of trouble

oppressing her night and day—one way by which the wrong could be righted, and she still reign acknowledged mistress of her old home.

But youth and strength triumphed at last, and a day came when Kitty was pronounced out of danger, and from that hour her recovery was wonderfully rapid.

Soon she was able to sit up in her own room, nursed and tended by Biddy's devoted care, and rejoicing in the gentle languor of slowly returning strength.

No word had been said by Biddy of her strange good fortune. Some instinct seemed to tell her that Lady Ellingsworth was the proper person to make the communication, and she awaited her pleasure with silence and patience.

Since that interview between them Lady Ellingsworth had scarcely spoken to her except on matters connected with the sick room, and Biddy observed an equal reserve. She felt it must be very hard for this proud, beautiful woman to see herself supplanted and deprived of what she had looked upon as her lawful heritage. But her lips were sealed. She dared not speak. Some day the truth would be known—some day Lady Ellingsworth, proud and cold as she seemed, would acknowledge that the ends of justice had been reached. Thus in her faithful, ignorant fashion she consoled herself.

At last, however, Hermia felt that she could no longer delay the explanation. Kitty was able to sit up in her room all day now, the only remains of her illness being a slight cough which the doctor declared she would shake off in time.

The damp autumn weather was most unfavorable to recovery; and the girl looked very frail and languid when Lady Ellingsworth sought her late one afternoon when Biddy had gone downstairs to her tea.

Kitty was lying on a couch by the fire. She looked up in some surprise as she saw who was her visitor.

Hermia drew up a chair, and stirred the coals to a brighter blaze. There was no light in the room but that of the fire.

"You are very much better, are you not?" she asked.

"Oh, I am almost well," said Kitty, raising herself from the pile of pillows. "I shall soon be able to go downstairs I hope. I'm sure," she added, "that I have given you a great deal of trouble in addition to your other anxieties."

"I think," said Hermia coldly, "you were excessively foolish to linger in that storm as you did. I cannot understand

why you had not reached the house before the worst of it came on ! ”

Kitty flushed crimson. She knew perfectly well that the delay had been owing to her own outburst of temper, to that little ebullition of spite and jealousy when Lady Ellingsworth had driven off by Laurence Moira's side.

She said nothing, and for a moment or two silence reigned in the room.

“ I suppose,” said Hermia at last, “ that you are well enough to hear some news—it is good news—even though unexpected.”

Kitty looked at her eagerly. “ News ? ” she echoed. “ Concerning me ? ”

“ Yes, I have been waiting till you were strong enough to bear the shock—if good fortune is ever a shock. In fact, Kitty, without further preamble, I have come here to tell you that my father has left you all his money ; that you will be mistress of Knockrea when you reach the age of twenty-one.”

The girl sprang to her feet, white and trembling, and gazed with blank astonishment at Hermia.

“ Knockrea—to me !—Mr. Marsden ! ” she gasped. “ Lady Ellingsworth, is this a jest—are you making sport of me ? ”

She sank back on the couch once more, her eyes fastened in incredulous wonder on the pale proud face of the woman she had always envied.

“ Why should I tell you what is not true ? ” said Hermia coldly. “ I have simply stated a fact. It is perfectly incomprehensible to me why my father has done this. He gives no reason. I believe you are nearly eighteen, are you not ? Well, in little more than three years you will be undisputed mistress of the Knockrea property. I suppose I ought to congratulate you for making such excellent use of your opportunities when you were staying at the house. My father has given undeniable proof of his affection for you.”

Kitty sat like one stunned. She could not fully realize this wonderful news—could not believe that her wild dreams of wealth, freedom, independence, were at last verified. It seemed like the ending of a fairy tale, altogether too good to be true.

“ You seem bewildered,” continued Hermia presently. “ Is it so hard to believe in good fortune ? I thought perhaps the news might not be quite—unexpected. Did my father never give you any hint of his intentions ? ”

“Never!” exclaimed Kitty. “Never once. Indeed, the last time I saw him he told me he had done all he intended for me. He spoke as if I had nothing more to expect at his hands.”

“It has taken every one by surprise,” said Hermia. “But facts are facts. Of course, you will gain no immediate benefit from your position. I hold everything in trust for you till you are of age. But I shall allow you a suitable income, and if you take my advice you will go abroad and complete your education, and try to fit yourself for a position that will be no easy one. The scheme of adopting music as a profession of course falls to the ground. You will not need to work for a living. But the more accomplished and the better educated you are, the easier you will find it to overcome the prejudices of society. Your future here will depend greatly on yourself. You know, or perhaps you do *not* know, the peculiarities of the Irish gentry. In spite of your wealth and in spite of your position, they may refuse to know you. It is not unlikely. You see every one in the village remembers your antecedents. There is nothing harder to live down than such memories!”

Kitty’s face had grown scarlet as the low scornful voice spoke out these hard truths. She began dimly to realize that she might after all find little enjoyment in her new dignities. She was not “to the manner born.” People would be ready enough to remind her of the fact, and half the enjoyment of her good fortune would be gone if she could not queen it over the county.

A little vague distrust of herself began to take the place of her first elation. She spoke almost humbly. “I will do whatever you think best, Lady Ellingsworth,” she said. “You were very good to take me in here, and I am not ungrateful. Of course I know my own deficiencies. I am not a lady born like you.”

There was a mixture of shyness and eagerness in her face that half disarmed Hermia’s repellent attitude.

She looked so young, so lovely, so fragile, that for a moment the elder woman’s heart went out to her in a rush of answering sympathy. After all, Kitty was not to blame for what had happened; and who knew but that she had a right, equally with herself, to this coveted heritage?

“I will do my best for you,” she said more gently than she had yet spoken. “I think myself you are more to be pitied than envied. Wealth is a great responsibility. It relieves

some of our burdens, but it lays others upon us equally heavy. Above all, wealth to you will mean the danger of unhappiness. Men will woo you, and you will distrust them. Flatterers will surround you, and you will find it hard to distinguish false friends from true. Every success will make you fresh enemies, every false step will prove the worth of untrustworthy counsellors. I speak from knowledge of the world, and experience of life—life that has no path of thornless roses even for beauty and wealth and youth to tread.”

The swift sudden tears of weakness and perplexity sprang to the girl's eyes. It seemed to her that the first cloud, “small as a man's hand,” was already hovering on the horizon of her firmament of joy.

She shrank from putting into words her own confidence, her own hopes. She only remembered that she would have to face one day a social tribunal, over which women like Lady Ellingsworth reigned, and that they would pass judgment upon her as only women of assured birth and position are at liberty to do.

She grew very pale, and Lady Ellingsworth noted her distress, and thought that after all the girl might have good points—might be capable of taking a place in the world that would at least be creditable if not distinguished.

Her hands, white and fragile with illness, lay clasped on the white flannel dressing-gown she wore, and Hermia's eyes rested on them with sudden curiosity. Then her glance fell on her own. They were singularly, almost identically alike. The recognition of that fact raised a sudden anger in her breast. She had always been renowned for the beauty and perfect shape of her hands; but—they were an inheritance from her mother's family.

Abruptly she rose from her low chair by the fire and pushed it aside.

“We must not talk any more to-night,” she said. “You look fatigued, and Biddy will blame me for overexciting you. Try and rest, and don't think more than you can help of all this.”

She moved away as she spoke, and at the same moment Biddy entered the room.

“I have told her,” said Hermia coldly and passed out, leaving the old woman and her charge together.

Biddy closed the door and advanced slowly.

“Shall I light the candles, darlin'?” she asked.

“No,” said Kitty nestling back among her pillows.

"Stir up the fire and sit there and let us have a good long talk. Oh! Biddy, have you heard—do you know what's happened?"

"Troth and I do, darlin'. I know that ye're to be the mistress of Mr. Marsden's place, every stick and stone av it! and a rare piece of good luck, more by means that it wasn't ivir expected. Know, is it? why, iviry tongue in the village is blabbing of nothing else. Shure 'tis the grandest news they've had this many a day."

"I can hardly believe it's true," said Kitty, closing her eyes with languid enjoyment. "Why, Mr. Marsden was hardly civil to me the last time I saw him. Certainly he has never shown me any affection, and surely it is very unfair to Lady Ellingsworth to leave everything away from her."

"Thru for ye, alanna, it is that," agreed Biddy, "and it's a heavy heart she's carryin' this day for all she seems so proud and indifferent. But shure, it's not for the likes av us to be meddlin' wid the rights and wrongs of the matter. 'Twas a hard end and a cruel the poor man had, and meself is the shamed and heart-broken woman, Kitty child; and, indade, if Mr. Marsden had known who fired that shot it's another sort of last will and testaymint intirely that he'd have been makin', and not you or any Maguire in the place 'ud have been found in *that*."

"But I am not a Maguire, really?" said Kitty opening her eyes and looking eagerly at the old woman's troubled face. "Oh! shall I ever learn the truth of my birth? It is hard, horribly hard, Biddy, not to know my own name, not to know why I have been cast off in this fashion. Oh! Biddy dear," she added with sudden soft entreaty, "won't you tell me *now*—at last? Surely I have a right to know. Surely you might strain a point and give me some hint, even if you won't trust me entirely."

Biddy shook her head. "I cannot," she said; "not yet. But the truth is bound to come out, child, and the day is not far off; rest contint as ye are. Maybe, alanna, ye'll have more cause for grief than joy whin ye learn the saycrit I've kept so long!"

Kitty was silent. Her suspicions had grown stronger since the news of her fortune. Philip Marsden was the last man on earth to have made such a will had he not been in some way compelled by a sense of duty and obligation. Well, she reflected, in any case, nothing could rob her of that inheritance,

Strange and unaccountable as it seemed, she was in a fair way to realize those dreams of her childhood whose first roots had been discontent and envy.

She lay there in the firelight, and let her thoughts drift back to that hateful time in order that contrast with the present might appear the more delightful. No need to labor, no need to strive and rebel and vex herself as of late; no need to fear rivalry of beauty or of wealth; no need, indeed, to fear anything except that mystery of her birth—except the revelation of some shame or secret wrong which should cling to her future even as it had clouded her past.

She shrank from following this thought too closely. In its place she let another glide, elf-like, from some sylvan hiding-place of fancy. It was a pleasant thought to all appearance, for the rich color crept into her face, and her eyes had a strange, shy light in their glowing depths. “I wonder what *he* thinks of me now!” it whispered.

CHAPTER XLIII.

“HE”—if that undistinguished pronoun meant Laurence Moira—was just then occupied a great deal with thoughts of Kitty.

Her accident, her illness, and then her sudden leap into fortune and notoriety had naturally brought her personality before him in strange and perplexing guise. The servants at Knockrea had spread the news of the will far and wide, and even the murder had engaged tongues and speculation less than the fact of Kitty the Rag’s heiress-ship.

The Swan and the Red Hen talked themselves hoarse, and the latter grew more mysterious and more prophetic than ever.

These two characters had established themselves comfortably in Biddy’s cottage, and made themselves quite at home with her goods and chattels, as well as the stock of eatables she had left behind her. As week after week passed they began to consider themselves part owners of the premises, and to assume a new dignity and importance by reason of so respectable a domicile. With that happy knack of jumping at conclusions that distinguishes the Irish character, they had almost settled that Biddy would live at Mount Moira or Knockrea for the future, and that they would remain “tenants at ease” of her deserted cottage, as, of course, Kitty would never expect such a thing as rent from old friends like themselves.

So they made themselves thoroughly at home, and considered that Providence had been unusually considerate of them in their old age.

Meantime Laurence Moria found no means of satisfying his curiosity respecting Kitty. He did not like to gossip about her with the farmers, or village folk. He was unable to see Lady Ellingsworth, and Mrs. Montessor could tell him nothing. As the summer waned and autumn drew on apace he began to miss those evenings at the house more and more. It was dull work reading treatises on farming, instead of listening to the pleasant chatter of cultivated and graceful women, to hear the loud tones of Larry Dunn’s wife scolding the children, or farm-servants, instead of the music of Kitty’s voice breathing out the lovely old melodies he loved.

Mrs. Montessor asked him over to dine once or twice, but as the weather broke and the incessant rains commenced, he did not care about driving in an open vehicle for so many miles, after facing wind and wet the greater part of the day. He worked hard and incessantly; he tried to inspire these lazy and careless people with something of his own hopefulness and ardor. Wherever he found such virtues as hereditary principle or loyalty, he did his utmost to foster and encourage them.

He had studied the ways of the peasantry long enough to know them. He had a keen comprehension of their weaknesses, habits, and prejudices. He could appreciate fine touches of character—the wit and humor and patience and stoicism which make the Irishman part buffoon, part hero, and incomprehensible to almost every one except himself and his nation. Having once undertaken the work of agent he meant to carry it through, and he showed that he meant it. There was no question of startling, only a careful and incessant interest in all and every tenant's welfare, needs and doings. Personal supervision did wonders. The stimulus of rivalry and good-humored banter set many a lazy man to work, and produced its effects on ragged hedges, unweeded gardens, broken fences, and the hundred and one "dilapidations" which mark so many Irish properties.

His own relationship to their absentee landlord gave him an influence with the tenants that no stranger would have had, and Micky Corrigan's example was a strong incentive to others.

"Ah, 'tis the throe blood's in him! Shure, 'tis he's the rale gintleman to dale with!" was the universal comment, and the idea of getting equal with "schamin' upstarts," such as the prosperous farmers of Knockrea or Dunsane, stimulated many of the Mount Moira tenantry to work with a will in preparation for the next seedtime and harvest.

Laurence Moira had considerable difficulty at first in getting sufficient money from his uncle for really necessary repairs and improvements. Some portion he himself advanced, knowing that he could repay himself out of the rentals, and feeling certain that no one would be more pleased and astonished than Gerald Moira when he returned, and saw that his property had improved into a flourishing and respectable estate.

But that, of course, lay in the future. A great deal would have to be done before such agreeable results were evident. Laurence Moira's own idea, however, was to "get *at* them,"

as he termed it. To have a personal interest and a personal incentive, and to work on their feelings so strongly that they might be safely left to mutual emulation and good-humored rivalry for results.

So in these dreary autumn evenings he studied, wrote, and planned, and finally worked out a thoroughly effectual scheme for rendering Mount Moira a credit instead of what it had long been—a disgrace to the country.

But all this did not occupy his thoughts too exclusively, for the intrusion of Kitty's face, Kitty's lovely eyes, Kitty's wonderful voice, and strange history.

He by no means thought her perfect. He had read even in their brief acquaintance something of that pride and envy and intolerance which went far to mar the girl's character. But he told himself that her youth and her strange bringing-up excused much that in another would have seemed inexcusable. The right influence, the right training would do all that was necessary to make her almost as perfect as was Lady Ellingsworth. There lay his ideal. He could form no higher conception of lofty and high-souled womanhood. There was nothing in her or about her that did not to his thinking express what was noble, beautiful and self-sacrificing. Wherever he went he heard her praises, and they were sweet in his ears; and when, after the tragedy that had fallen on her life, he learnt the strange story of her disinheritance, he felt all the chivalry and devotion of knighthood glow within his veins at the thought of her sufferings and her wrongs.

He longed for some sign, for a summons to her presence, but none came. She seemed to have forgotten his very existence, and he would not force himself upon her notice. It was sufficient that she was unhappy, that she chose to remain isolated; that he could do her work and save her trouble and annoyance. He asked nothing more. It would be useless to deny, however, that he was curious about this whim of Philip Marsden's—that he would not have given a great deal to discover the secret tie associating Kitty Maguire with the strange, cold-hearted, selfish recluse who had owned Knockrea, and was so universally disliked. Yet he gave no sign of his curiosity, but simply listened and commented upon what he heard, and drew his own conclusions. He no longer wondered that Lady Ellingsworth had shut herself up in this strange fashion—that she shrank from either pity or remark. He felt humbled for her humiliation, indignant at her wrongs. That Kitty herself

was blameless he knew ; but she was the instrument that had dealt this cruel blow to the woman who had so generously befriended her, and she suffered in his thoughts accordingly.

Many weeks had drifted by, when at last a note came for him from Hermia asking him over to dinner, and to spend the night.

He accepted it with a gladness that proved how sorely he had missed and longed for the summons. He reached the house just in time to dress for dinner, and went down to the familiar drawing-room with a strange, nervous thrill of heart that surprised himself.

Kitty was there alone. She was sitting by the fire. She wore a simple white gown of some soft thick material, with not an ornament or a flower to relieve its unadorned simplicity. Her illness had left a certain delicacy and fragility behind that lent her a charm of refinement she had previously lacked. As she rose to greet the young man a faint blush swept through the ivory pallor of her skin—touching even the tips of her delicate little ears.

Her beauty came to him as a fresh surprise. He was so absorbed in its contemplation, that he forgot he was holding her hand an unnecessarily long time. He released it suddenly and took the chair near her own.

“So you are quite well again,” he said. “Do you know, I have never forgiven myself for leaving you behind that day? I should have insisted on getting out, and letting Lady Ellingsworth drive.”

“Then, perhaps she would have met with an accident,” said the girl lightly ; “and that would have been a thousand times worse. Don’t look so regretful, Mr. Moira, it can’t be helped now.”

“But why,” he persisted, “did you linger behind such a long time? You had fully a quarter of an hour to reach the house before the full violence of the storm, and yet you were found in the very place where we had left you.”

Kitty’s face grew rosy red once more. “Oh ! what is the use of talking about it now?” she said petulantly. “I was foolish, and I have paid the penalty of my folly. Surely that is enough. I wanted to ask you something about Mr. Marsden’s murder. Do you remember that man we met who was hiding his gun in the hedge?”

“Of course I do,” said Laurence Moria, “he is now in jail on suspicion of being the murderer.”

“Do you think he did it—really?” asked Kitty.

“I haven’t the slightest doubt on the point,” said the young man. “The evidence is as plain as it can be. He was caught in the act of escaping, and he still had the discharged gun. Besides, he was so drunk that he partly confessed it. I—oh! but I remember you told me you were interested in this man Maguire.”

“Yes, though I have always disliked him. It is for his wife, poor Biddy, that I feel. It will be an awful blow to her.”

“And yet, from all accounts, a good riddance,” said Laurence Moria. “The man is a regular ne’er-do-well—an idle, mischievous loafer, for ever drinking and talking sedition. He had no real grievance against Mr. Marsden, only he belonged to a society vowed to the suppression of landlords. Poor fools, it is hard to convince them they would be worse off left to each other’s tender mercies than in the hands of the strictest landowner in the country.”

“Oh! they are awful people,” exclaimed Kitty. “I shall be thankful to get out of the country, and I intend to do as soon——”

She stopped abruptly.

Their eyes met. “Ah! yes. I have not congratulated you on your good fortune,” said young Moira in a somewhat constrained voice. “Of course, I have heard of it. You no not intend living on your property, then?”

“It will not be in my power to do so for some years,” she said, “so I shall go abroad. I have always longed to do so. Now, at last, I have the chance.”

He was about to answer, when the door opened to admit Lady Ellingsworth and Judith Montessor.

The young man was startled to see how ill Hermia looked. An intense melancholy brooded in her eyes and threw its shadow over the brilliant loveliness of old. Her very voice seemed changed, and into its rich music had crept a minor note of hopelessness.

She greeted him without any gladness or welcome, and he felt his heart sink at the change he read. A sort of constraint rested on the whole party, and the announcement of dinner was a relief. Laurence and Judith Montessor had most of the conversation to themselves. The presence of the servants made it inadvisable to enter upon any topic connected with recent events. It seemed to Laurence

Moira as if the whole atmosphere of the place had changed since last he had sat at that same table, and been one of those same guests.

When the ladies left he asked permission to accompany them. He felt no inclination to linger over his wine alone, and Lady Ellingsworth ordered coffee at once in the drawing-room.

The room looked charming and homelike in the glow of fire and candle light. Lady Ellingsworth had transformed it entirely since her tenancy of Mount Moira, and Laurence found himself wondering if it could really be the same room. He made a fresh effort to break through the cordon of restraint that seemed to surround them all, but all his efforts were unavailing.

Kitty was ill at ease and self-conscious; Lady Ellingsworth sat apart, melancholy and silent, and he and Judith Montessor found few subjects sufficiently impersonal to discuss.

At last he suggested some music. "If you only knew," he said, "how I have pined for a song, or a bit of Chopin or Mendelssohn, as a variation to Mrs. Dunn's scolding voice, and the children's unmusical squalls, you would pity me!"

Hermia glanced at Kitty. "Will you sing for us?" she said. "That is to say, if you feel equal to the exertion."

"Oh! I am quite well now," said the girl eagerly. "But it is so long since I have sung that I hardly know how I shall get on."

"I'll play for you," said Judith Montessor, going over to the Broadwood grand and opening it.

Laurence Moira dropped into the vacant chair by Hermia's side.

She glanced at him. "I sent for you to-night," she said, "because I have a proposition to make. I am sure you are most uncomfortable at Larry Dunn's. I want you to take up your abode here instead. I have decided to go abroad, to Italy, almost immediately. I may be away a long time, months, years, I can hardly say. But I feel I am under certain obligations to your uncle, and I should like to think you were here, and that the household would be under your charge. I hope you will agree to my suggestion."

"But," he said, "the Italian scheme was only on account of——"

She made an impatient gesture. "You mean that in Kitty's altered position it will not be necessary to adhere to our old plans for her. True, but she wishes to leave Ireland all the same, and I must place her in safe hands. I am, in a way, left responsible for her."

As if moved by the same impulse, they both looked at the slender young figure standing by the piano. Mrs. Montessor struck the opening chords of "Shule Agra," and Kitty began to sing the first phrase.

Suddenly, without warning, her voice broke; a harsh croaking note escaped in place of the lovely full volume of sound she had been wont to breathe.

She stopped dismayed, her hand went to her throat. "Oh—what is it?" she cried piteously. "My voice is gone!"

They all surrounded her. Judith tried to soothe her. "It is only weakness," she said compassionately. "You will find it will be all right as you grow stronger."

But Kitty only stood there white and dumb, the great tears rolling down her cheeks.

For she knew that the "bird in her throat" was silenced for ever. That the one glory and pride of her life had been taken from her, that never again would she thrill the hearts and enchant the ears of those who had prophesied she might be a world's wonder.

As she saw their pitying eyes, a great wave of misery seemed to break over her heart. She covered her face with her hands, and with a low, sobbing cry she rushed from the room.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THEY looked at each other in consternation as the door closed.

“What was it?” asked young Moira.

“Her voice seemed to crack suddenly,” said Mrs. Montessor. “It was very curious. I remember a similar case, a girl who had a lovely soprano voice, and she caught a violent cold, and had inflammation of the vocal cords. She could never sing again without the chance of her voice cracking on a note in the same unexpected fashion. Doctors could do nothing. They thought she would recover in time, but she never did. Her very apprehension of a catastrophe spoilt her nerve. Perhaps that exposure to the storm has injured Kitty’s throat in a similar manner. However”—and she glanced at Hermia’s face—“it is not of such consequence now, she does not require to earn her livelihood any longer.”

“She seemed terribly distressed,” said Laurence Moira, a vivid memory of that piteous face and those tear-filled eyes flashing before him.

“Naturally she would be,” said Lady Ellingsworth, turning away from the piano. “She was excessively vain of her one accomplishment.”

Moira wondered that she was so unsympathetic. His ideal seemed to lose something of perfect womanliness in that moment.

They all moved back toward the fire, and he returned to Lady Ellingsworth’s proposition. “I shall of course be delighted to stay here,” he said. “But I trust you will not make it a matter of *years*, Lady Ellingsworth. We cannot do without you in this part of the country. They are too many absentee landlords already.”

“Oh!” said Judith Montessor, “you need not be alarmed, Mr. Moira. It will not be a question of years, I am sure. Lady Ellingsworth is far too fond of Ireland to endure voluntary banishment. When she has recovered her health and spirits we shall have her back again in the old country, I am certain.”

"I am distressed to find you looking so ill," said Laurence Moira, glancing at the beautiful, melancholy face turned so listlessly away from them. "I fear all this terrible business has been too much for your strength."

Hermia grew a shade paler. "It was very terrible," she said; "and the trial has still to come off; that will be a worse ordeal than all."

They discussed its various points and probabilities; the hopelessness of Jim Maguire's case, and the reason of his rooted hatred of Philip Marsden.

Half an hour glided by. Kitty did not return, and a sense of disappointment crept over Laurence Moira. The whole evening was a failure. The whole atmosphere of interest and friendliness had changed. Lady Ellingsworth listened to his account of struggles with obstinate tenants, and still more obstinate prejudices, but she listened without eagerness, and rarely smiled even at his humorous descriptions of arguments used, and examples afforded.

Meanwhile Kitty had flown up the broad staircase and rushed into her own room, and there lay prone on the bed, sobbing wildly and passionately in this first outbreak of grief.

The shock and surprise of that discovery had filled her with shame and terror. She had never known how she valued that pure natural gift of song, rich and spontaneous as a bird's carol, until she had heard that harsh, horrible note issue from her aching throat, and seen the dismayed and astonished faces of her listeners.

Never again to charm their ears, never to hear praise and wonder, never to feel that power of moving or delighting others; it seemed a cruel and most hard fate. She knew *now*, as she had never known before, that the ease and grace and accomplishments which made Hermia so distinguished, as well as so admired, would never be hers.

There are certain feminine graces which are purely natural. No teaching can bestow them. Manner is one, dignity is another. Neither of these was Kitty's.

Her old dislike of Lady Ellingsworth leaped into life once more. "It is all her fault," she cried wildly.

All the fault of that hateful day when slumbering jealousy sprang into vivid existence and she had been made to feel her comparative unimportance in Laurence Moira's sight. She would never have stayed out in the storm, never have run the risk of accident and peril, if that meeting had not taken place.

Kitty was just in the most irrational and violent of all the moods of youth. She had wanted to stand well in one person's eyes, and that had been prevented. She had gone downstairs to-night longing to exercise the old charm of song, to see his face turn to her in that wondering glow of admiration and delight which thrilled her vain little heart to its core, and she found herself—voiceless! What mattered her beauty now, undeniable as it was? What mattered her new gifts of fortune? In this man's eyes she felt they were of no account, for *he knew her*.

Her history was common talk here. To him she would always be the village child, the nameless creature who had shared a murderer's home, and been fed by the bread of charity!

All her young angry soul awoke in the fierce passion of that hour. The wrongs thrust upon her seemed to outweigh a thousandfold the benefits she had received.

"Oh, why was I ever born?" she cried. "Why did God make me to suffer like this—to be the wicked, rebellious, envious thing I *know* I am? I seem to hate every one. There's always something inside me at war with everything *outside*. And I feel as if I shall grow worse and worse. People will despise me and look down upon me, even if I am rich. Riches are not everything. They can't make me a lady—a lady like *she* is—and now my voice, that, at least, would have won me notice—I feel it now that the power has gone. Oh! life is hard, and God is cruel! I wish I had died in that storm. He was kind to me that day. He was quite different to-night."

So she stormed and raged in the dark loneliness of her room. Her slender form was shaking with deep-breathed sobs, her hands were twisted in the soft coils of her hair. Life at that moment was only agony and anger.

So Biddy found her as she entered the room, candle in hand, to tidy it for the night.

"Kitty—why, Kitty, darlin'! what in the livin' wurld's the matter, child? Why aren't you downstairs in the company? Are ye ill, darlin'? Ah! don't be brakin' your heart wid thim sobs, and not a fortnight out of bed this blessed day."

Kitty raised herself from the pillows, and threw herself into the tender arms of the oldest and most faithful friend she had ever known.

"Oh, Biddy, Biddy!" she cried despairingly, "I'm so unhappy."

"Unhappy is it, mavourneen?" and the old woman held the slender figure more closely, and gazed down with yearning eyes at the hidden face.

"What's your grief, darlin'? What's happened at all? They've not been spakin' unkindly to you downstairs, have they?"

"Oh, I hate them all! I hate Lady Ellingsworth, and that cold, clever friend of hers. I'm not like them. Nothing can make me like them. Oh! I know it now, I know it now. And, oh! my voice has gone, Biddy. I can never sing again. I tried to-night, and not a note will come out properly. I feel as if my heart was broken. I don't care for anything. I don't want to live. Oh! Biddy, I wish I had died years ago when I was only a little child, running after you in the potato plot."

Her sobs broke out again, and Biddy's tears began to fall in sympathy. "You'll make yourself ill, Kitty darlin'," she entreated, "and 'tis only fresh heartache ye're givin' me wid your words, seein' as 'twas meself saved you from death whin those to whom ye belonged were only willin' it to ye. Ah, wisha, wisha! Have I brought ye out of poverty and distress only to hear this? Shure, if yer voice is gone, darlin', haven't ye your face and your wealth left, and why would ye be wishin' yerself dead and out of it at all, at all? Sufferin', is it, ye are? Ah! darlin', 'tisn't the outer manin' av that word as ye've learnt yet. Could ye rayde my heart, and hear the tale of me sorrows, mavourneen, ye'd wonder ye made so much av your own."

Something in the simple pathos of those words went to the girl's wayward heart. She ceased sobbing, and lifted her head and gazed with tearful eyes into the old, worn, wrinkled face that never in all the years she remembered had worn a harsh or unloving look for her. "Has life been so hard for you, Biddy?" she said wonderingly. "I have never heard you complain."

"Complain, is it, darlin'? Shure, doesn't the blessed Lord know what's best for us? Not but what I've found it in me heart to say the hard wurd av Jim many a time. But there, poor sowl, we must lave him to God's mercy now. Ah, Kitty, Kitty machree, the young don't know what rale sorrow is. It's whin the heart strings av a woman get twined round husband and child, and they bring grief and shame upon her head, that the throe manin' av it comes to her; and that's bin the way

wid me, darlin', this many a year, and sorra a bit meself to blame for the bad luck av it. Ah, well, God's will be done! That's what we've all to larn to say even whin the one breaks our heart that we loves nixt to God!"

Kitty was silent. For the first time in her life her contemptuous tolerant pity for the poor Dalin' Woman sank abashed and humbled before this patient courage, and this simple faith. All the miseries of that hard, cheerless life flashed before her. Its charity and kindness had been proverbial. No beggar had ever left her door without some friendly aid, some kindly word; nor friend nor foe had ever asked in vain for Biddy Maguire's good will or gracious help.

Kitty remembered this now, though in her hours of triumph and prosperity she had half despised what in reality she could not half comprehend. The gate of suffering often leads to the road of comprehension, and Kitty was learning the alphabet of life's lesson at last.

She ceased to sob; she rose from the bed and pushed back the disordered hair from her brow.

"Sit down by the fire and talk to me Biddy," she said as she wheeled a deep-padded easy chair forward and held her cold hands out to the blaze. "I am not going downstairs again; I don't want their pity."

"But what is it all, darlin'?" asked Biddy, "your voice was gone, you said—maybe 'tis only from weakness that is, and the bad cough ye had—ye're forgettin, darlin'. Whin the warm days come, and yer strength comes back, shure ye'll be all right again. Don't be frettin' about it, for indade tears nivir mended a throuble yet, though many's the fine eyes spoiled by rayson of not rememberin' that."

"Biddy," said the girl suddenly, "has Lady Ellingsworth said anything to you about our being here?"

"She has, darlin'," said the old woman, with a sudden tremor in her voice. "And 'twill be a fine thing for you intirely, and the gran' lady ye'll be whin ye come back."

"Will you be very lonely, Biddy?" pursued the girl.

"Lonely, is it, agra? Shure, haven't I me trade to think of? It doesn't lave much time for loneliness between Christmas Day and Christmas Eve."

"But, Biddy—I was thinking perhaps you would like to come with me," suggested Kitty.

"Ah, now, the blessin's of heaven on the kind heart av ye, darlin', but shure, crossin' the says and associatin' with

foreign nations, it's more than I'd have the courage or the strength for. Besides"—and her eyes rested with new tenderness on the fair young face by her side—"besides, Kitty child, ye're best lavin' me out av your new life. There's things not to me credit as will be spoken of—though it's not my fault that disgrace has fallen upon me name. The heavens above give me stringth to bear it! for, though poverty and hardship's no stranger to me, darlin', yet me good name was something, and it's hard to forget that there was a time whin me people were well known and respected. Yes; and had the fine bit av land, too. Ah, Mother of Heaven, give me patience that I may never turn me tongue on him that's brought all the throuble upon me!"

She wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron, and Kitty could not but recognize the quickness and delicacy of feeling which had prompted such self-denial. She knew that dearly as Biddy might long to accompany her she would not do so since this stigma had fallen upon her; since it would be in any one's power to say that Lady Ellingsworth was accompanied by the wife of her father's murderer.

"But shure, I'm goin' to kape up the good heart," continued Biddy presently. "My hopes for you and my love for you will be like a blessin' on me life, and the time will soon pass, darlin', and then you'll have your own, and be livin' like a quane among us, and——"

"No, no," interrupted the girl passionately, "that is just where you are wrong, Biddy. I never can live here, at Knockrea, as anything else but what they've known me. That's what's in my heart, what I *feel*. The real gentry of the place will never treat me as an equal. Do you think I can't feel that, even now, even here? I am only on sufferance; they just tolerate me, that is all. Ah! Biddy, I am learning my mistake. I thought it was so easy to be a lady. But it's not a matter of fine clothes, or servants to wait on you, or a grand house, or plenty of money. It's something *in* one—something money can't buy; you know yourself that I can never be like Lady Ellingsworth."

"Ah! 'twas always herself you took for a model, by comparison," said Biddy slowly; "and indade, darlin', it's not much av a difference I can see between ye."

"But, oh!" cried the girl passionately, "the difference that I can *feel*, Biddy!"

CHAPTER XLV.

SOME instinct of pity for the hurt young vanity of the girl she was compelled to befriend, made Hermia pause at her room door before retiring to rest that night.

She knocked softly, and receiving no answer, opened the door and looked in. The fire was burning brightly, a shaded lamp stood on a small table by the bed. The slow regular breathing of its occupant showed that she was asleep. Hermia stood beside her, noting with grave cold eyes the beauty of the long curling lashes, the shape of the sweet, red mouth, the flush on the delicate cheeks.

That memory of some one whom the girl at chance moments recalled, once again swept over her, and left her pained, perplexed, doubtful as it had always done.

“What will be her fate—what will she make of life?” she thought; and the memory of her own girlhood rushed back like a whirling torrent, and she saw amidst its wild waters the broken fragments of good and evil actions, the temptings, delusions, sorrows, suffering that had been her portion.

Her face grew pale, her eyes filled. “Who am I that I should judge, that I should be merciless?” she thought. “This girl stands alone, friendless, on the threshold of womanhood. The sin that brands her with shame is not hers. She may have to tread a harder path than my feet found. Why is it that I only feel resentment when I should be filled with compassion? Like me she is fatherless and motherless, for all we know. Her beauty may only be a snare. Life holds so many hours of bitterness even for a beautiful woman——”

The girl stirred uneasily, as if the consciousness of another presence made itself felt even under the spell of slumber.

Lady Ellingsworth remained quite motionless, watching her intently. Then, as softly as she had entered, she left the room and went to her own. She drew a chair up to the fire, and sat there for long, gazing into the dull red glow.

The little timepiece above her chimed out twelve silvery peals. She started, and lifted her white face from the hand that had supported it. Her hopeless eyes looked at the dial, and she rose and rang for her maid with a sudden memory of

conventionalities. But the girl was dismissed as soon as her mistress's hair had been brushed and arranged for the night, and again Hermia took that chair and resumed those melancholy reflections which were becoming habitual.

Life was gradually centring itself in memories, and losing its hold on active duties. Ghosts of dead youth, dead hopes, dead passion, came to her now in these midnight hours, and looked at her with those sad eyes of a glorified past that will always have the power to move a woman's heart.

Sleep rarely visited her now. She dreaded the long wakeful hours when thought would grow acute, and no blessed rest would lay the calm hand of peace upon aching brain and torturing memory.

At times like these the longing to hear that voice, to see that face which had once meant all the glory and all the shame of life, tore fiercely at her heart strings.

Since that night in the ruins they had never met. Only at a distance had she seen the face she loved—the face that now was aglow with earnest sacrifice, in which the soul's light burned with such strange glory.

To-night the longing was like a living agony. It seemed to her more than she could bear. She sank down by the chair and bent her head on her folded arms, and cried aloud her misery and despair to Heaven.

He had found peace—he had cast aside the dross of earthly things—but to her were left the turmoil and the fire. There were times when she felt that to embrace his faith—to give herself up to the Church that had comforted and supported him—might after all prove her best safeguard. Oh! to throw off this heavy burden—to know for even one brief hour the sweetness of peace!

“Oh! God pity me! I am so tired of sorrow,” she sobbed, overcome by the pathos of her own grief. “Oh! to blind thought—to cast it away, away into outer darkness, and dream oneself at last into forgetfulness!”

The fire grew dim. The shadows stole apace across the room and lost themselves in dark, untenanted spaces.

This was their hour; they were not wont to share it with any living thing. But still she knelt on, and still her heart cried out in voiceless prayer; for grief, like love, takes no count of Time—and to both a day is as a thousand years, and a lifetime as a day!

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The mockery of sunlight calling the sleeping world to life, and marking the era of new duties and new responsibilities, broke over the dark jail where a condemned criminal had slept his last earthly sleep. Hope that to the last had lingered in buoyant hearts scornful of earthly justice, could linger there no longer.

It had long left the breast of one sorrowful creature crouched beside the prison gates—and yet she lingered there to see that last and terrible signal float above the dreary walls she had learnt to know so well. All night she had sat there—turned away by compassionate authorities only to return again. The cold and dreary silence of the night had passed; mist and darkness had fled; and the hope and glory, for ever quenched in a human heart, laughed in mockery of woe from the cloudless blue above.

The woman drew the hood of her cloak closer about her as if to shut out the sight of Nature's loveliness. Only as the daylight brightened, did she lift her head and glance at the gathering crowd, watching with herself for that awful signal.

No one spoke to her. An awed fear subdued all voices to a whisper, and gave to sorrow such as they might not share, the respect of silence.

Moment after moment passed. Surely the time was at hand, and yet eyes sought in vain the signal.

A stir and tumult took the place of the previous hushed expectation. A hand touched softly the shoulder of the crouching figure.

"Biddy," said a voice, "Biddy woman, shure there's something happening inside there. 'Tis a quarter past the time, and sorra a sign of a flag to be seen, bad cess to it."

A haggard face looked up at the speaker. "What's that ye're afther sayin', Moll Callaghan? Shure, my wits is dazed intirely. Ah! indade, 'tis kind of you to wish to be deludin' me, but the hour's past for that, woman dear. He's looked his last on this side av Heaven. May the Blessed Mother have mercy on his sowl!"

"But I tell you, woman, there's bin no flag—no signal. Come, sthir yourself, and ring the bell, they'll tell you if anything's wrong wid the man; or maybe 'tis pardoned he is afther all."

"Pardoned!" At that wild improbability a wilder light leaped into Biddy Maguire's eyes. She staggered feebly to her

feet. "Who says pardoned? Oh! Holy Mary be praised, if it's throe. Pardoned! Oh! me heart's like to break wid the joy av it."

She threw up her arms with a strange cry, and then suddenly fell forward on the ground. A score of willing arms raised her. She was well known to many there; and that curious celebrity attached to her as the wife of a lawfully condemned man, which appeals so strongly to the Irish lower orders.

They took her into the nearest house, and did their best to restore her to consciousness. When at last she opened her eyes her thoughts seemed wandering. She talked in a weak, childish fashion of bygone things and people. She knew no one around her. A doctor was hastily summoned, and hearing of the anxiety, grief and exposure she had undergone, shook his head gravely over any prospect of recovery.

They told him who she was, and learnt in return that the execution had *not* taken place that morning. A weighty and sufficient reason had postponed it, for a mightier than the earthly hangman had interfered with his office. Jim Maguire had been found dead in his cell when the jailer brought what was to be his last earthly breakfast. His constitution, long hopelessly impaired by drink and dissipation, had suddenly given way under the restrictions and terror of prison life, and the ultimate shock of his condemnation.

But Biddy was unable to understand that she had been spared that last terrible disgrace. Her mind was quite gone.

Toward night her voice seemed to clear a little. She looked anxiously round the room. Two familiar faces met that wondering gaze. They were those of the Swan, and the Red Hen. Biddy made a sign.

"Fetch me a praste, quick," she entreated; "shure, my end is near. I feel it. Let me make my confesshun and die. Isn't Jim waitin' for me? I see him—so young and handsome, just as whin he came coortin' me—and Eugene, where's Eugene? Where's me boy? I can't die aisy widout seein' him. Oh! for the love av Heaven bring him to me, and God will reward ye!"

Johanna had hurried off at the first mention of the word "praste." There is no more terrible idea to the Irish mind than that of dying without the "hand of the clargy."

Johanna did not know much about Limerick. She and the Red Hen had come there to comfort Biddy in her hour of

need, so they said. In reality, however, they had been consumed with longing to be on the ground, and know all that took place from the hour of the "black cap" to that of the black flag.

As she hurried through the streets Johanna called to mind that she had seen a chapel somewhere in the neighborhood, and there might be a priest to be found in its vicinity. It was past the hour of Benediction. There was a chance of meeting one. As she neared the building she saw a figure coming toward her, and knew that her surmise was correct.

She rushed up to him without ceremony.

"Good-day to your Reverence. 'Tis a praste I'm in search of. There's a poor sowl in need of you, and cryin' for the crucifix to be put upon her. Haste, your Reverence, there's not a moment to lose. 'Twas dyin' hard she was whin I hastened from the bedside, manin' to bring the first of your honor's persuasion that should chance to cross me path."

The priest looked at her. "You are sure," he said, "the end is near? Have I time to return for——"

"Time, is it, your Reverence? Not a moment. 'Tis this way, down the next street. Shure, 'tis ashamed I am of me indacent expedition, but the inimy of sowls is always on the watch at the death hour, as well your Reverence knows."

They hastened on. The priest asked no particulars. He was used to these breathless summonses. To die without priest or prayer is an appalling thought even to the worst, or best Catholic.

In ten minutes' time they reached the house where Biddy had been carried, and Johanna ushered him into the room where she lay.

Biddy was sinking rapidly. She had borne up bravely through the ordeal of the trial, through the terrible days intervening between the giving and the carrying out of the sentence, but at last Nature had sunk under the severe strain.

She lay there—her eyes closed, her face ashen grey, her pale lips babbling of days long gone by, days of girlhood, marriage, motherhood—and then ever and again she would call on her boy's name, beg him to come to her across the cruel seas. He had been gone so long.

The priest stood by her side as if turned to stone. The dying woman's face was not paler than his own. Mechanically he murmured the familiar words, and raised his hand to make the familiar sign. It sank powerless to his side.

"Eugene!" cried the feeble voice. "Will no one tell him? will no one bring him? Eugene! Eugene!"

The priest turned to the kneeling women. "Leave us," he said hoarsely, "I will hear her confession."

They obeyed immediately. He watched the door close, then dropped on his knees by the dying woman's side. "Mother!" he whispered. "Mother, I am here. Don't you know me?"

His voice seemed to pierce the mists fast gathering about those wondering senses. Her eyes opened. Fearfully, incredulously, she gazed at the face so near her own. Then a great cry as of joy too terrible to bear burst from her pale lips. She started up, and her feeble arms sought to embrace the kneeling figure, but sank weakly to her side.

"The good God above has heard my prayer," she murmured. "It is Eugene's voice!"

"Yes," said the priest, "I am indeed your son. Surely the hand of God has led me to your side in this hour of extremity!"

The dying woman fell back on her pillows. A great fear and a great awe were in her eyes as they rested on the bowed head by her side.

"The hand of God!" she cried. "Oh! my son, I'm feared to tell ye; is it the will of heaven that ye're to hear my dyin' confession?"

"Say all that is in your heart," he said. "Have no fear."

Her trembling fingers made the sign of the cross.

"Eugene," she said, "I've a saycret to lave behind me. I've carried it in my breast these many years. Listen." She moved closer. Her feeble lips approached his ear. She whispered for a few moments.

Suddenly he sprang to his feet, horror and incredulity on every line of his face.

"Mother," he said hoarsely, "think of what you are saying. Are your wits wandering?"

"No, my son," she cried piteously. "Before heaven and you 'tis the truth I've spoken. 'Twas the hard man he was, and cruel, and niver would release me from my oath. But Death sets us free from all such promises, and the burden's gone at last. Oh! the peace and joy av it!"

Her whole face seemed illumined by some inward joy. She gazed at his pale countenance with eyes that seemed to see beyond and above all mere external things.

"Give me your blessin', Eugene," she cried, "and let me die in peace. For my work's done in the world, and my heart's last wish is gratified. Eugene, *aroon, vick machree, wuil thu lhum? wuil thu lhum?*" *

She had relapsed into the Irish tongue, and half mechanically he answered in the same.

"*Ish maheen a tha in a vair dhulish machree.*" †

The old familiar tongue stirred old familiar memories to life in both hearts.

She smiled fondly in his face. Changed and sad and austere as it was, to her eyes it still seemed the face of her boy, the "beloved son of her heart."

"Lay the blessed symbol on my breast, Eugene," she sighed, "and bless me for the first and last time, as the servant of heaven ye are."

But he neither spoke nor moved,

"Eugene!" she implored, "I'm dyin'. Give me your blessin' and the absolution of my sins!"

A hoarse cry escaped his lips. He shrank back. "I cannot, mother! I cannot. 'Tis I who am guilty; 'tis I who need pardon."

"The blessin'," she cried again. "The blessin', Eugene. Let me die in peace."

Trembling he laid the little ebony crucifix he carried on her breast, and then gently crossed her hands.

"Die in peace," he murmured—"with God and with man, poor, trusting, honest soul, to whom life has meant but pain and sorrow of heart. Verily, you shall have your reward."

"Now kiss me, Eugene, my son, and call me 'mother.' Shure the blessed Christ won't be begrudgin' me carrying that word in my heart to the gates of Heaven itself!"

He bent and his cold lips touched her colder brow.

"Heaven's blessing on you, mother," he cried passionately. "For you will be peace and glory evermore; for me—the memory of guilt and wrong and shame, undying as hell's torments."

He sank down once more, his head bowed on his folded arms in bitter self-abasement.

The living and the dead held one dread hour of self-

* My beloved, son of my heart, are you with me?

† I am with you, beloved mother of my heart.

communing. Silence profound and unbroken reigned in the room.

Perchance the released spirit hovered pityingly over the earth-bound form, kneeling there in heart-broken misery, crying vainly to a pitiless fate for the boon bestowed on her—peace and rest.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE priest left the house and took his way with agitated steps to his own residence.

The night had fallen dark and chill, sleet and cold winds met him with unfriendly greeting in the almost deserted streets.

Strength and self-will were once more assertive within him, the memory of that last hour was giving way to the demands on his future course of action which it had necessitated.

The position he held in his order compelled him to ask for leave of absence on urgent private matters connected with his native place. He knew he must go at once—to-night—or it would be too late. If he caught the last train he would reach Knockrea in time to get a vehicle to take him to Mount Moira. For it was there he was bound. On the morrow Hermia would have left for Italy—left with that secret unknown—unguessed.

His agitation and dismay were too apparent to be disregarded. His request was granted at once, and the train was soon bearing him in the direction of Knockrea. It was a long drive from the little wayside station to Mount Moira, and he had some difficulty in getting a vehicle. It was almost midnight when he reached the entrance gates. There he dismissed the car after liberal payment, and hastened up the avenue, marveling whether the household had yet retired for the night.

As he approached he saw lights in an upper window, but the rest of the house was in darkness. He rung softly at the hall door. Some moments passed, but no notice was taken of the summons. Again he tried, and presently came the sound of bolts and chains, the door was opened slightly, and a voice demanded who was there.

He knew the voice. It seemed to him that even were he dead, and lying forgotten in the cold earth's breast, that voice would have power to recall him to life once more.

"Hermia!" he said softly, "it is I—Eugene. I must see you at once. It is imperative."

She opened the door and stood there facing him. The candle she carried showed her his pale, tired face and trembling lips, and showed him too how changed and ill she looked.

She was too startled to question him; as he entered she stepped back and led the way to the first room they reached. It was the library.

She placed the candle on the table, and then turned to him. "What is it—what has happened?" she faltered.

He glanced round, then went over and closed the door.

"You need not fear that any one will hear us," said Hermia. "The servants have long gone to bed. It was because they could not hear your ring that I came downstairs."

He noticed that she wore a loose gown of black serge, with a thick cord girdling it round the waist. It was almost nun-like in its severe simplicity.

"You had better sit down," he said. "What I have to tell you will take a long time."

She walked over to the big leather armchair by the nearly extinct fire, and seated herself. She almost fancied she was in a dream from which she must presently awaken.

He stood before her, leaning one arm on the chimney-piece, his eyes averted from her white, changed face. "Hermia," he said abruptly, "I have come to you to-night from the death-bed of my mother."

"Of Biddy?" She started and looked at him eagerly. "Oh, don't say she is dead—poor soul, poor, faithful, old creature! Was it the shock of what happened to-day?"

"Yes. My father was spared the shame of the gallows, but, nevertheless, the shock killed her. He was found dead in his cell this morning. I have not learnt the cause. I was unaware even that she was in Limerick. I was summoned to her bedside in my capacity of priest, and had to receive her last confession. Hermia, she told me a secret that she has kept all these years—the secret of the child she nursed and adopted."

"Kitty?" faltered Hermia breathlessly.

"Kitty is her name. Had the secret been confided to me under seal of confession, it would not have been in my power to divulge it, but she told me as mother to son—as concerning myself, Hermia—and you."

The face before him could scarcely grow whiter than his

own. They looked at each other, and agonized fear met agonized assurance in that glance.

"The child you bore *did not die*," he said. "Biddy received it from the woman who tended you. At first they had thought it dead, afterwards they knew its death was only too eagerly desired, and all your father heard was that it had gone. Your life was almost despaired of. There was not a doctor in the wretched little hamlet. How you recovered seems a miracle. Chance had taken my mother there on one of her dealing expeditions, and she of course recognized your father. He bound her by an oath never to reveal the secret, save on her death-bed. He had his daughter's honor to save. She thought only of her son's career. My career!"—he broke off abruptly. "As if the stamp of infamy can ever be erased, as if my guilty conscience had ever ceased to upbraid me with my sin!"

He laughed harshly. "Well," he said, "they settled it between them. I was despatched to America and put into a seminary, first in New York, then in Quebec. Years passed before I returned to Ireland. I was told it would be better to keep away from home, and I did so. A priest has no need of family ties. My parents never knew I had come back. You—you only discovered it, Hermia, and now, to-night, I am here to tell you this. Kitty . . . is under your roof, is she not? You must tell her the truth: that you are—*her mother*."

Hermia sat there as if turned to stone. Kitty's mother—she? and all this time she had believed it was her father's child that she was befriending with cold patronage, receiving on sufferance under her roof, for his sake.

A deathly chill seemed to creep over her—face and limbs lost all sensibility or power. It must be a dream—a nightmare of wild impossibilities—from that peal of the bell down to this present moment.

He looked at her, and saw she had not yet fully realized what she had heard—what it entailed.

"Hermia," he said entreatingly, "don't look like that. Speak, for God's sake. Are you not glad that she lives, that the hand of fate has led her to you? Will not her love console you for all I have made you suffer?"

Then she flung up her arms with a wild cry, and starting to her feet began to pace the room like one distraught.

"Love!" she cried. "*Her love!* Why, she hates me,

No voice of nature has ever spoken from her heart to mine. We have been enemies—always. We are enemies still."

"But not when she knows, Hermia."

She stopped and looked at him with the eyes of one who hears her eternal condemnation.

"*When she knows!* Have you thought of what that means?—the story of my shame to be told by my own lips to my child . . . the story of her wrongs to come to her from the woman she has envied, and emulated, and disliked. Oh! pity me, Eugene, pity me! How can I do this thing? Oh! if it wasn't cowardly I should like to kill myself to-night. The thought of life's misery makes death so sweet. And you—can you pray still, Eugene? Can you talk of God's love and pity? Pity!—oh where has it found place in this love of ours?"

She wrung her hands. Her white face looked in agonized beseeching at his own.

"I can talk of God's justice," he said solemnly. "We sinned in His sight, Hermia. Every day and hour of our wrongdoing demands its penalty. Who are we that we should escape?"

There was a long silence. She stood leaning one hand against the table. Her eyes fastened on his face in dumb beseeching. That piteous look cut him to the heart. All the manhood within him answered to its appeal—all the priesthood rebuked it.

Yet what could counsel and orthodoxy do here, to bind this broken heart, to restore this ruined life? To acknowledge her child *now* meant her own shame, her own ruin. To deny her was but to add further wrong to those already heaped upon an innocent head.

He leant his head upon his folded arms as he stood against the carved oak mantel, and groaned aloud.

"The germ of joy has long been dead within my soul," he said. "But you, Hermia, you! You have not deserved to suffer. From first to last I have been the offender, and yet I may not help you now in this your need."

Still she was silent. Still the turmoil and the anguish raging within could find in words no expression, or relief.

The slow moments ticked on their passage into midnight. Solemnly the hour struck in the silence.

He lifted his head and looked at her,

Then at last she spoke. "To-morrow," she said, "it is already to-morrow, we were to leave here—to go abroad."

"Yes," he said, "I know. That is why I came here without an hour's delay."

"And you wish me to tell her *this*? Have you thought of all it will mean?"

"Yes," he said. "I have thought of all. But so much wrong has been done I cannot counsel any more. It is right she should know."

"Know that I am her mother—that you——"

There came a sudden fierce cry! The velvet *portières* separating the library from another and smaller study into which it opened, were swept aside.

Clutching them with one hand, her face ablaze with indignation, her eyes flashing scorn at the two figures cowering there in guilty silence, stood Kitty.

CHAPTER XLVII.

INVOLUNTARILY Hermia moved a step nearer to the priest. The girl stood in the same place, but the curtain had fallen from her hand and made a dull background for her white figure and the rich masses of her streaming hair.

"Do not think I was listening purposely," she said in a low constrained voice. "I heard movements and voices, and I came downstairs thinking you might be ill. I waited a moment there . . . the door was open . . . the curtain could not deaden your voices. I—I heard ——"

Hermia sank into the chair and covered her face with her hands. She could not bear the scorn of those flashing eyes—of that young indignant face.

"Is it true?" continued Kitty, her lips quivering, the color rising and paling in her cheeks.

The priest crossed his arms upon his breast. He stood midway between mother and child. All the shadowy memories, the strange likeness she had recalled each time he had seen her, rushed to his mind. He could only wonder now that he had not recognized her long since, for Hermia, as Hermia had been in her passionate wayward youth, confronted him once again, looked through his eyes to his guilty soul, and read his weakness and his shame.

He felt like a ghost meeting a kindred shadow, and shrinking awe-struck from its presence.

"You don't speak," continued the girl, glancing from one to the other. "Are you afraid, or ashamed, because I have learnt your secret? . . . you the grand lady whose pride was a byword once, and you a priest of God who won souls to His service! A fine secret indeed! No wonder its knowledge was hidden so carefully. No wonder that I was thrust away, given to a beggar woman's care and a beggar's life, so that *you* might cheat the world, and *you*"—she turned her flaming eyes on the priest's ghastly face—"might cheat heaven!"

"Child, be silent," cried Eugene sternly. "You speak, unknowing what you say. Your mother never knew of your existence, never learnt that you had survived your birth till—to-night."

A burst of hysterical laughter escaped Kitty's lips. "A likely story," she said. "Do you think I shall believe it? A mother, and not know that she had a child, that it had life, and being! I am not a good enough Catholic, father, to believe in miracles. And, even if *she* did not know, what about yourself, may I ask?"

"I," he bent his head, "I am the most miserable of sinners. Rightly am I punished in this terrible hour. Will you hear the story from my lips? I would spare your mother *that* pain."

The girl looked at him—her breast heaving stormily. All that was worst and most rebellious in her nature was raging in her soul to-night.

Her limbs trembled under her. She felt faint and sick with the horror and the shame that had thrust themselves upon her ignorant young life.

She sank into a chair, and leaning her arms on the back, turned her face from his, and laid it on them. "You can tell me what you please," she said.

Very quietly and patiently, with broken words, with tender exculpation of the heart-stricken woman who neither moved nor spoke, he told that sad familiar story of youth, of wild hot love, of discovery and separation. He told how he had been destined for the priesthood, and that his mother would have sacrificed everything in the world for that object. It had been no case of ruin or desertion. It had only been a fatal love rendered impossible of honorable consummation. An inexorable hand had thrust them apart. He had been consigned to banishment. *She* to that hapless fate of womanhood she had recklessly challenged. Rapidly he sketched that picture of misery and desolation, of parted lives, of the taking up of the threads of existence and weaving them into a new pattern, from which all but the memory of the old was eliminated. Then with faltering tone he told of the truth learnt too late, of Philip Marsden's stern purpose, of his refusal to permit the disclosure to Hermia of her child's existence, and his own grudging assistance in raising that child from obscurity and poverty at Biddy's earnest solicitation.

At that point the girl lifted her head and faced them again. "So that is why he left Knockrea to me!" she cried. "He at least has tried to atone for the wrong done by all concerned in my miserable existence!"

Her face had grown hard and set. All the softness and

beauty of youth seemed to have left it. Rage and indignation at life's injustice were all she felt. No pity for the humiliation of these poor sufferers. No comprehension of what agony this scene must have brought to the proud beautiful woman against whose virtue no stone had yet been cast.

The cruelty of youth is a savage and relentless cruelty, because youth alone seems to claim life's fairest and sweetest promises for its own. For those who wrest such joy from its eager grasp, it has no pardon.

Kitty stood in her own sight as the wronged and suffering victim of a selfish passion. What cause for thankfulness had she for the gift of life? In the past it had only meant misery, in the future it would only mean shame. How could she bring herself to give a daughter's love and duty to these two sinners? How treat as a mother the woman she had scarcely even regarded as a friend?

Nature does not always speak to human hearts. A child's love is a subtle thing built up of many memories and associations. In none of these things had Kitty held any part with the woman who sat there, crushed under the burden of a vain remorse.

Resentment alone fired her soul. What right had this mother of hers had to hold her head so high in man's esteem—to enjoy the world's homage and the world's praise, while *she*, the child born of youth's unthinking passion, had been condemned to hardship and contempt?

She rose suddenly from her seat, and at the movement Her-mia's hands dropped, and she looked up.

What a face! what a wreck of former pride and beauty it was on which those pitiless young eyes rested.

No longer had it the power to mask the inner tragedy of anguish, passion and regret. Plain for all eyes to read, they looked out from those windows of despair to which her soul only lent the light of suffering.

"What will you do? what is to become of me?" continued Kitty passionately. "I can claim your name, so much I know. Do you wish to keep your secret, Lady Ellingsworth, and you yours, Father Considine? I promise you I won't betray either of you."

She laughed mockingly. They shuddered as they heard her. The sin that had been so sweet took its uttermost vengeance upon them in that hour when they saw themselves despised, mocked, hated, by the child of that sin!

They looked at her with sad hopelessness. It was useless to plead. Her heart as yet untouched by any love, unscathed by fire of passion, unknowing save by impersonal knowledge the power and madness and fidelity and strength of the one great tragedy of human life, could comprehend only the sin, but not its extenuating causes.

They bent their heads to the storm and let her rave. Love she had none, duty they dared not claim. "It is God's will, . . . it is our due!" cried each tortured heart, and the beauty and the grace and the passion of this wayward thing, bound to them by the closest tie that nature knows, came as a fresh reproach as they listened to her upbraidings.

"She is my child and she hates me," thought the mother, and it seemed to her as if the cup of life's suffering was full to the brim at last.

The priest, on the other hand, was living through an experience destined to mark the extent of his transgression with indelible pain. His had been no sin of intent; but as he watched the wavering line of its consequences, springing from youth's heedlessness, culminating in manhood's shame, he knew that in the hope of purchasing mercy by self-renunciation he had forgotten that justice had a prior claim.

"*Mea culpa, mea culpa*," had long and often been his cry, while his conscience had been kept painfully alive by the throbbing of an unhealed wound.

But his own suffering to-night was doubled by the consciousness of what Hermia endured.

To hear the pitiless condemnation of the child for whom she had almost given her life: what fate more cruel for a mother!

In pity for her suffering he tried to stem the torrent of Kitty's wild reproaches.

"Child, child!" he implored, "you have said enough. Leave us now. It is our hour. We would be together."

Something in his voice quelled her wild rage and shamed her into silence.

She looked at his white, sad face, ennobled by grief and suffering, and it seemed to her that she was treading upon unknown ground. Awe-struck she gazed, then moved sullenly away.

"I will go to Biddy," she cried wildly. "She was right. She alone understood me. She alone loved me. She, in all the world, is the only one I can call friend!"

The priest looked at her. "You cannot go to Biddy now," he said. "Did you not understand? . . . the death-bed by which I prayed . . . the dying lips whose secret gave me the clue to your history, they were——"

"Not Biddy's—oh, don't say they were Biddy's!" cried the girl in sudden terror.

"Yes," he said. "She has won her title to God's grace at last. Few deserved it as she has deserved it."

For one moment Kitty stood there, battling with the shock of these new tidings.

Then the tears gushed forth, and she covered her face with her hands.

"Oh! I have no one," she sobbed. "No one!" and she rushed from the room.

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They turned and gazed at each other as the curtain fell.

The little wavering circle of light thrown by the solitary candle made still more haggard their uplifted faces.

"The judgment of God is upon me," he said. "What use to struggle? Prayer and penance have availed nothing. Hermia, it was decreed that our sin should take living shape and condemn us with living voice. What shall comfort us in this our hour of doom?"

Then the womanhood within her stirred and woke from its long dream of coldness, and her own need of comfort led her to comfort him.

"At least we know the worst, Eugene," she said. "And knowing it can we not brace our energies to meet it?"

"To meet it," he said hoarsely. "Yes, that has to be done. How can I spare you, Hermia, how sweep from your path the shame that I brought you in exchange for your love?"

"I do not ask to be spared," she said. "I would sooner face truth than live a lie. But, Eugene," she rose and softly went to him and laid her hands in his, "your vows are not irrevocable . . . your office need not claim you for ever! No, don't start; hear me. If you had found peace or happiness or content I would have kept silence, but I know you have not. You have confessed as much. Why continue to suffer this spiritual torment, why bear this life of unnatural manhood? You have repented your sin sorely and deeply, and yet——"

He clasped her hands and held them against his throbbing

heart. "Ah, don't tempt me, Hermia," he cried wildly. "You give voice to the impious thoughts, the fierce desires that have thronged in my brain, and mocked me with vanished bliss! The garment of holiness is on me but the covering of hypocrisy, for I *know myself*, and God knows me, and when I take His name upon my lips, or perform the offices of the Church, I am as one tormented by mocking fiends. And yet, to turn aside, to be a renegade! Hermia, Hermia, be strong for me! Be strong for our past love's sake! I am as a leaf in the storm. I cannot think calmly to-night."

"No, for you are a man still, Eugene," she said. "And so were men made, and so can you best serve God. This bitter bondage has claimed you long enough. Oh! come back to *me*, Eugene—to love and life! The world is wide, and together we may find happiness once more. For I am tired of struggling against my misery. I am so lonely—so unhappy, Eugene."

Her head drooped and sank upon his breast, as the tearless agony of his eyes looked up to heaven.

"And so am I, God knows," he said. "Yet, Hermia, this cannot be. Wretched sinner that I am, why should I link my life with yours? That would not undo past wrong . . . it would but add to it!"

"No, no," she cried between her stifling sobs. "For shared with you my burden would grow light, and in the world, Eugene, there is work for all. The priest's garb is not always necessary for the priest's service. You can work for men's souls still, and I will help you. We will leave this land and its sad memories behind us, and begin life anew, side by side as once we dreamt."

His gaze, tender and sorrowful, rested on her bowed head. The arms that held her trembled with the sweetness of new hope.

"It was only a dream," he said. "Only a dream."

"A dream that years of misery and separation have not killed out of my memory, Eugene. What of yours? Oh! listen, listen. Exchange this false unnatural life! Can any future hold worse trials than these past years? And I have no strength any longer. Eugene, I want you! . . . *I want you!*"

Into his eyes there stole a fearful joy. All the sweetness and promise of life came back to him in the tempting of her words.

Why should he not yield? he asked himself.

The vows that bound him had bound others who had broken them for conscience' sake, or at the bidding of worldly wisdom, or ambition.

He might do the same. He might claim release. The work of the Church could be performed in secular as well as priestly garb. Was it not well said that "man looketh at the outward appearance, but God at the heart"?

The rules and restrictions of his order had often proved irksome to him in his labors. The narrow lines laid down had been often hard to tread.

And in this hour he knew, if he had never known before, that he had never successfully crushed out the human instincts within him. The sweetness of love, the possibility of reunion, flashed before his dazzled sight and filled his brain with long-banished fancies.

All of love, all of womanhood were for him centred in this sorrowful, clinging creature, whom he had wronged so deeply, but who seemed to him now as an angel beckoning to paths of happiness, speaking only forgiveness and hope.

Frightened at his long silence, Hermia lifted her head and looked at him. The tears were wet upon her cheeks, her eyes gazed into his with such beseeching as never had he seen in woman's eyes before. And then suddenly, without warning, the feeble light wavered and died out. They stood alone in the shrouding darkness, which only the dull and dying fire-light shared.

Alone and in the silence they heard but the beating of their own hearts—felt, yet saw not, the quiver of the lips that half unconscious of the impulse turned and met and closed each on each in a passion of yearning tenderness that would not be denied.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

ALONE, and half distraught with misery and shame, Kitty paced to and fro her room.

All the preparations for the morrow's departure were scattered about. What a mockery they seemed now!

How could she give herself up to that companionship—how associate as of old with one claiming her by this new tie? It seemed hateful and impossible. Yet she was her lawful guardian; all she owned and possessed came through her.

"I will not live with her," she told herself again and again. "I hate her, I despise her! She is a living lie, a whited sepulchre. I cannot *feel* she is my mother. I cannot call her by that name. I will not acknowledge her right!" Then her tears rolled forth again. "Oh Biddy, Biddy!" she cried, "why have you left me too, now when I need you most! now when I can value that patient, honest love of yours!"

Choking sobs rose in her throat. She threw herself on the bed in a convulsion of grief.

Granted wishes had indeed proved a curse to her.

She had craved for wealth and position. Both were at her feet. She had longed to exchange the humble cabin for a lady's life. She had known no rest to that consuming curiosity to learn the secret of her birth. She had desired a name, and the name she could claim would, if needful, cover her mother's shame effectually, for Kitty Marsden might well pass as the child of her benefactor. All this she remembered, and every remembrance was but a new stab of pain to her vain and wilful heart.

The selfishness that had characterized her life seemed in no way the better of this fiery ordeal. It was always of herself she thought. *Her* suffering, *her* shame seemed preëminent; they allowed no room for pity for others, no allowance for temptation, no compassion for sin. The "first stone" was at her hand, and she flung it with merciless aim. Understanding nothing of what she condemned, she was also incapable of extenuating it.

The fire had long died out. The room was chill and cold. She shivered as she lay there, clad only in the thin dressing-gown she had thrown round her before that hurried exit.

A sense of personal discomfort at last took the place of personal misery. She rose and crept back to bed and lay there shivering and wretched, unable to sleep, and tortured by thoughts that were only the keynotes to a life of disillusion.

She had taken no count of time. It seemed as if years had passed since that strange ring had wakened her, and half fearful, half curious, she had stolen down the stairs to learn its meaning.

Suddenly she was conscious of a light shining through her closed and swollen lids. She started up, and saw Hermia standing beside the bed holding a small lamp in her hand.

"Kitty," she said, "I could not rest, I could not sleep till I had come to some understanding with you. Will you listen to me for a few moments?"

The girl sat up and pushed back her falling hair.

"Of course I will listen," she said coldly. "Perhaps you had better put down that light. It hurts my eyes."

Hermia placed the lamp on the dressing-table, and seated herself by the bed.

"There is no need to go over the old ground," she said. "You know my secret, and your history. You said you did not believe in my ignorance. But it is true, Kitty. As God hears me *I never knew you were alive*. They told me you died soon after you were born, and I believed it till—to-night. My father was a cold stern man. He never forgave my sin and my disgrace, though he shielded me effectually from exposure. I left Ireland almost immediately. I never returned until I was married to Lord Ellingsworth."

The memory of that summer evening when she had leant over the cottage gate and watched the carriage bearing the "beautiful lady" to Knockrea House, flashed back to Kitty's mind.

How scornful had been the glance that swept over the ragged child, and how that child had envied the woman. Yet now by fate's strange workmanship the positions were reversed. The woman it was who, shamed and humbled, pleaded for the child's pity, the child who had grown to womanhood, and was now accuser and judge of a guilty mother.

"My father," continued Lady Ellingsworth, "must have learnt of your existence from Biddy. For that reason he had

you rescued from your obscure position and educated. I cannot understand why he never told me—why he left you his heiress without explanation of the reason. But I am glad he did you so much justice. I am glad that one day you will reign in honor in my old home. . . . And now, Kitty, for what I have come to say to you. We cannot carry out the arrangements for to-morrow. Feeling as you do—as you expressed yourself—I could not expect you either to accept a false position, or force me to acknowledge the true one. This is no matter in which to take impulse as our guide. We must weigh well the *consequences* of our actions before committing them. The law gives to a child, born under your unhappy circumstances, only its mother's name. In that name Biddy affirmed she had registered your birth. You may call yourself Miss Marsden of Knockrea if you choose, and give, or withhold, the explanation. It is not for my *own* sake that I ask you to consider the matter carefully before you make your choice. There is no use in exposing to the world our private histories. My father's one desire was to keep my secret, and it has been done so successfully that even I guessed nothing of it. Do not fancy, however, that I am going to shirk my duty to you. I leave the matter in your hands now. My home shall be yours, even as my name is. I will shield you and protect you to the best of my power, but I must tell you that I intend to leave Ireland; it is unlikely I shall ever return. Of course there is no reason why you should not establish yourself at Knockrea. But I cannot live with you *there*. I can never live there again. This is as much as is needful to tell you to-night. Now try to sleep, and if possible pray for gentler thoughts. You have been wronged. . . . I do not deny it, but the wrong was never an intentional one, and all that I can do to rectify it shall be done."

She rose as she ceased speaking, and for a moment stood there looking with sad beseeching eyes at the girl's cold face, so strangely like and yet unlike her own.

In her heart she could not blame this critical attitude—this absence of affection. Love does not spring up ready made at the call of duty. A child cannot love the author of its being simply because the accident of a human union has clothed a human soul with an undesired and unasked personality.

Kitty, to herself, stood quite outside the pale of the Fifth Commandment. She looked on this parentage of hers as an added wrong to her many self-inflicted sufferings. If she felt

anything at all in her present condition of mind, it was an unholy triumph in the humiliation of a woman she had always secretly envied, and vainly emulated.

"You don't speak," said Hermia sadly. "You cannot find it in your heart to say, 'Mother, I forgive you'?"

"No," cried Kitty stormily, "I *cannot*! I am no hypocrite; I can't pretend what I don't feel. Whatever of blame lies in this matter rests with you—and you alone. I don't even feel sorry for you. I ought to, no doubt, but I don't! You must have known what you were doing. . . . You could not have given yourself up body and soul for the mere sake of love, without some thought of consequences. I am only a girl, and ignorant and foolish, but at least something *within* me tells me that."

She turned and hid her face in the pillows, ashamed of the sobs that once again burst forth. "Oh, go, go!" she cried stormily. "I am ill and tired and wretched; I want to be alone."

Hermia moved silently away.

"It is my punishment," she said in her heart. "What right had I to expect anything but condemnation at her hands?"

Like a ghost she went across the carpeted landing to her own room. The grey dawn was gleaming chill and pale through the window. Her face looked haggard and drawn in the dreary light. Her soul's agony confronted her as she met her own reflection in the mirror.

The scales dropped from her eyes. She saw her sin, not as the unthinking, heedless impulse it had been, but as the guilt of woman against all womanhood.

To give life to another, to condemn to suffering and ignominy a soul that but for selfish forgetfulness might have known no conscious existence—that was what women did, as wickedly, as heedlessly as a child that sends a sportive feather down the winds of chance.

Love is a divine good as well as a divine gift, but love made the slave of passion falls from its high estate and becomes a thing of shame and terror and crime. Hopelessly, helplessly she read this truth at last, and falling on her knees in the dreary dawn she cried to heaven for comfort.

The child of her love and her sin had turned a deaf ear to her entreaties—would God be equally pitiless?

Amidst the wild tumult of her thoughts it seemed to her

that suddenly a voice spoke. Like the words of an accusing angel she heard once more the words of her own selfish entreaties seeking to recall to herself what had been vowed to heaven.

She lifted her face and shuddering looked around. The memory of that scene rushed back to her. She saw once more the anguished eyes—she heard once more the arguments that tried to combat her entreaties.

Again she felt the terrible sweetness of that close embrace—the strange unholy joy that spoke of spirit conquered by the flesh. She had recalled him to herself, had claimed from the service of heaven what would henceforth mean the service of love. And yet now the sense of triumph brought no delight. It seemed as if she were but adding shame to shame.

Again that voice, piercing as a two-edged sword, clove darkness. It was at her ear.

“Shalt thou escape the penalty of the broken vow?” it seemed to say; *“and to thy unrepented sin add yet another? Mock not heaven nor God with wild beseeching. They heed not prayers such as thine!”*

Slowly, fearfully she staggered to her feet. Her haggard eyes looked once again at their own likeness and read their terror and her doom.

“It may not be . . . it cannot be. Not thus is sin atoned for!” cried her stricken soul. “Lost joys may not be recaptured, and guilty love may not re-live its passionate delights. In tempting back that other soul, a new wrong has been committed. Not thus is peace with heaven to be made—forgiveness on earth to be won!”

Then as if impelled by an invisible power she sank once more upon her knees, and from her eyes the tears gushed forth like rain.

“It is just . . . it is right!” she cried. “What am I that I should stand between a man’s soul and his God? Ah! no! no! I give him back to heaven. . . . There, at last, may be reunion, pure and eternal as once we dreamt of here. So may our sin be atoned for—so may forgiveness be ours at last!”

Her head sank lower and with strange heaviness upon her folded arms, and softly, like a cloud, came a blessed unconsciousness of misery and pain and all the woes of earth.

CHAPTER XLIX.

LAURENCE MOIRA drove over to the house at noon that day. He learnt to his surprise that the departure of Lady Ellingsworth and Kitty had been postponed, and that the former was seriously ill. Hearing also that Mrs. Montessor had been hastily summoned he sent a message to that lady asking her to see him for a moment.

She came to him after a short delay looking very grave and anxious. "I cannot tell what has happened," she said. "Lady Ellingsworth's maid found her lying unconscious on the floor of her room when she went there at seven o'clock this morning. She was still dressed as when she had left her. The doctor says she must have been in that state for hours. We thought she would never revive, and now she only lies there like one who has had some awful shock. She never speaks, and her eyes have a strange blank look as if her mind had gone. Kitty, too, is ill. She is in bed with a feverish cold. It is altogether most mysterious. They were both quite well when I parted from them last night. What can have happened?"

"Have you questioned the servants?" asked the young man anxiously.

"Yes, but they know nothing. The footman fancied he heard a ring at the front bell about midnight, but not hearing it repeated thought he was mistaken, and went to sleep again. You know what Irish servants are."

"Indeed I do. But there seems some mystery here. Did no one else hear the ring?"

"The servants say not—Kitty won't speak at all. She looks awfully ill also."

"What ought I to do under the circumstances?" asked the young man uneasily. "I came here to stay, you know. My things were all sent over yesterday."

"Then stay by all means," said Judith Montessor. "Your room is ready I know, and the house is certainly large enough for all, even if we have to engage a trained nurse, as Dr. Carrick thinks probable. He fears brain fever."

Laurence Moira looked terribly distressed. It was all so sudden and unexpected. Certainly Lady Ellingsworth had looked very ill and changed of late, but he had attributed that to grief at her father's death, and all the circumstances following. He had never dreamt of anything serious underlying that change.

Mrs. Montessor excused herself from any further conversation, and left him to himself.

The house was to be kept very quiet by the doctor's orders, and throughout the day he absented himself, so as to make no demands on the servants. Toward evening he returned. The report was still unfavorable. Lady Ellingsworth could scarcely be called conscious. Neither could she be induced to take any nourishment whatever.

Kitty, however, seemed better, though she refused to leave her room. According to Judith Montessor, she had expressed neither concern nor surprise at Lady Ellingsworth's strange seizure. She heard of it with perfect indifference.

"I don't know what to make of the girl," continued Judith. "She is a puzzle to me. Any one colder or more ungrateful it has never been my lot to meet."

Laurence looked somewhat uncomfortable. It had never occurred to him that Kitty was cold—her powers of gratitude were of course another matter.

"I am going to stay here to-night," continued Judith Montessor. "Lady Ellingsworth is in too critical a state to be left to the mercies of servants; and the nurse cannot be here till to-morrow."

"Is it really so serious?" exclaimed the young man.

"I should say it was as serious as it well could be," answered Judith gravely.

And she was right. For days *Hermia* lay in that state, the feeble pulse of life growing daily more feeble.

Existence seemed to have narrowed itself into a mere shadowy consciousness, and people passed before her as phantoms in a dream. Yet in the centre of her being throbbed a poignant suffering, from which she cowered and shrank in recurrent terror. For her, life was at an end. Her pride was broken—love, hope, peace were alike denied her. She had reached a height of sorrow where her soul sat alone, throned in melancholy isolation, feeling itself an alien from all that had been, or might be. To others it seemed that her brain was dulled, and all the active sources of life enfeebled,

but sometimes as her eyes turned to Judith's watchful face, they betrayed such agony of mind that she turned faint and sick with apprehension. What was the mystery they held—what fever of memory burned in their sad depths?

Kitty had recovered and came downstairs as of old, and the old routine of the household ran its accustomed course. But she too was changed. Sullen, absorbed, listless, she moved about the familiar rooms, interested in nothing, heeding nothing.

All Laurence Moira's efforts met with a chill response; she seemed absorbed by some hidden sorrow, whose nature she would not betray.

To their surprise she insisted on going to Biddy Maguire's funeral. Her body had been brought from Limerick to her own old cottage, and her friends and neighbors had "waked" it in grand style. Partly in sympathy with Kitty, and partly for the sake of his own interest in the Dalin' Woman's character and life, young Moira also attended the mournful ceremony. It was the proud boast of the neighborhood that such a "buryin'" had not been known for years. All the same it had been a thing of horror to Kitty.

She went through it sternly—unmovedly so it seemed—but her heart shed tears of blood; and there was a moment when she was conscious of but one mad longing—to throw herself into the ground that held her first and only friend, and bid them pile the earth upon her own ungrateful head, and bury her there beside her.

That night as she sat alone brooding in melancholy misery by the library fire, Laurence Moira entered and took the seat beside her.

"Kitty," he said gently, using the name by which he always thought of her, "surely you have grieved enough. There is so much sorrow hanging over the house, why need you add to it?"

She looked at him surprised and startled. "Is she worse?" she asked hurriedly.

"I fear so. At least her state is so critical that Dr. Carrick has telegraphed to Dublin for other advice. Kitty, have you thought what you will do . . . if—if our fears were realized?"

"No," she said coldly, "I don't see that it would concern me very much; Mr. Marsden has taken all necessary precautions, I believe."

The coldness and heartlessness of the words struck painfully

on the young man's ears. "You don't seem very grateful," he said, "for all Lady Ellingsworth's goodness to you."

The color flamed into her cheek. "I am quite as grateful," she said, "as she is good. You don't know her history, Mr. Moira . . . I do."

He started. "What do you mean?" he said. "Her history has only meant that she is a beautiful and accomplished woman, who has not grudged time, or talent, or energy in the service of the poor and unfortunate."

Her eyes blazed. She turned on him with sudden fury. For once passion escaped her control, and she let fall words that shocked and terrified her listener.

"*That* is your pure and virtuous piece of womanhood!" she concluded. "A woman who has lied to the world every day she has lived in it—who holds a secret that——"

She paused—frightened by the look in his face.

He rose from his seat and stood before her, tall and erect, pain and condemnation speaking in every line of his face.

"It is not considered polite," he said, "to doubt a lady's word—but ——"

Her contemptuous laugh cut across his words like whipcord.

"You know," she said, "I am not a lady; you need not be afraid of hurting my feelings. I am well used to discourtesy."

He walked slowly up and down the room trying hard to curb his own anger—to keep down his just indignation.

He stopped before her at last. "Kitty," he said, "do you know you are heaping up misery for yourself by your unhappy temper? You look at the worst side of life in everything. You place yourself and your own feelings before every other consideration. Oh! you may rage at me as you please. I am not afraid of hard words, and a girl's anger won't frighten me. But I think you need a little plain speaking, and I am going to give it you."

She was so astonished that she could say nothing.

"In the first place," he said, "you *are* ungrateful. You had no claim on Mr. Marsden, yet think of all he did for you. You had less on Lady Ellingsworth, yet she was ready to serve you in any way. You stand between her and her lawful rights—you have usurped her place, and won her home away from her, and she has never complained. I, from a dispassionate standpoint, can only see her as the benefactress, you as the ungracious recipient of her goodness and thoughtfulness."

"Have you any more to say?" asked Kitty scornfully as he paused.

"Yes," he said, "I have. I am inclined to be plain-spoken, you know, and I don't understand much about women. I confess, however, that I have never met with one who so thoroughly conveyed my ideal of feminine perfection as Lady Ellingsworth. To know her is at once a privilege and an honor. I simply cannot and *will* not endure to hear her spoken of as you spoke just now."

These words roused all Kitty's worst feelings. For one instant she tried to keep back the burning torrent of her righteous indignation. For one moment she stood before this audacious speaker, her hands clasped on her heaving bosom, the red blood flaming to her brow, then she flung prudence to the winds.

"Before you condemn me," she said, "you had better hear my side of the case. You think you know *her*—you are mistaken. You think you know me—you do nothing of the sort. Ungrateful you have called me! What call have I to be grateful to one who gave me life only to forsake me . . . who by the mere accident of chance raised me from the gutter to which I had been consigned! who has stood before the world as the pure immaculate piece of womanhood you and all men believe her, and all the time has been a living lie! . . . No, don't stay me. I tell you I *will* speak! She cheated her husband—she cheated the world—but she has not cheated me. I owe her no duty. I can force from my heart no love. Now, do you know who she is? this feminine ideal, this cold and flawless statue . . . or must I put her shame into words, and couple with it mine? for I am her child—*hers*—and Philip Marsden knew it!"

The wild torrent of words ceased at last. Laurence Moira stood before the enraged girl, white and utterly confounded.

He had no reason to doubt that she spoke the truth, but that truth was so appalling, so utterly incredible that he felt powerless to speak either dismay or unbelief.

"*You* . . . her child?" he faltered at last.

She looked at him defiantly; her dying wrath took fire again at his tone more than his words.

"Yes," she said. "She has confessed it to me herself. What have you to say *now*?"

He looked at her, lovely—stormy, petulant, unforgiving.

He had a great deal to say, but he felt this was neither the time nor the place to say it.

“I pity you both,” he answered slowly, “but I think I pity *her* the most.”

And he turned and left the girl standing there mute and abashed, her anger extinguished by tears of mingled remorse and regret.

CHAPTER L.

LAURENCE MOIRA closed the library door and went out into the grounds.

The impulse was purely mechanical. He scarcely knew he was in the open air, until the cold wind, blowing upon his uncovered head, roused him to the sense of material things.

Then he looked up at the clear dark sky, lit here and there by groups of stars. A miserable conviction of the hopelessness and sinfulness of life came to him at that moment. Hitherto he had taken it very much as he found it, neither expecting too much nor rebelling at too little. His temperament was buoyant and not sensitive. He looked for the best in every one, and convinced himself that he had found it. Some inner fund of poetry and romance that lives in all Irish nature led him specially to idealize womanhood. He had carried that ideal unsmirched and unspotted in his heart, despite much rough handling and sundry disillusion, impossible to avert from a man's life. But the full and gracious presentment of that ideal had only met him in the person of Lady Ellingsworth. There was in his feeling for her the chivalry of knights of old, the reverence of devotee to saint—of subject to sovereign. No element of personal passion mingled with these feelings. She seemed to him set far apart from such feverish insanities as mark the Court of Love; and now to picture her fallen from her high estate—humbled in his sight and in the sight of others! The thought struck him like a blow, and roused in his mind something of the same intolerant ferocity that a blow would have called to life.

“Kitty's mother! . . . Kitty's mother!” The words repeated themselves again and again. He remembered now the curious physical likeness he had noted between the girl and the woman, the little subtle peculiarities impossible to describe but now confirming this hateful story he had heard with “confirmation strong as Holy Writ.”

How mercilessly the girl had flung this confession at his feet! How vividly she had painted her own shame, in portraying another's!

All her pent-up indignation at the mystery which had shrouded her life, all her resentful jealousy of this beautiful woman, all the sorrows she had endured, the ambitions she had known, the humiliation she had borne had flamed forth in those burning words, had shown him the girl in a new light, as a martyr suffering for the wrongdoing of others, bearing the cross of shame while they wore the crown of honor. Yet he knew he would have given worlds that she had not told him this, that she had kept silence and shielded the name which ought to have been sacred in her sight.

He had old-fashioned ideas of duty and self-respect. Nothing had ever hurt him so much as that passionate declaration: "I owe her no duty—I can force from my heart no love."

He knew she spoke the truth. No love could spring from the knowledge of such wrong as Kitty had endured. It was the one wrong to which most women are merciless, especially the young and ignorant, who have not even learnt Love's alphabet, leave alone his tasks of passion and penitence and pain!

As he paced to and fro under the leafless trees a sudden thought flashed before Moira. It was just the sort of Quixotic chivalrous thought to which that inner romance lent itself. Why should he not throw himself into the breach between mother and daughter? Shield the one and save the other from that fiery ordeal of the world's scorn and the world's mockery which might at any moment be thrust upon their lives.

He could give Kitty his name and protection—a name loved and honored for generations past. As his wife she would have nothing to fear. As his wife he could compel her to keep her mother's secret.

To all curiosity on the subject he could give the baffling reply: "I am satisfied as to who my wife is. I know her history—and I have married her."

There would be no more said. Besides, scandals are soon lived down where one's life is irreproachable. And Kitty would be mistress of Knockrea, even as one day he might be master of Mount Moira.

The blood flushed warmly to his face. His tendency to look on the best side of things reasserted itself, and turned aside the bitterness of his past mood.

It all seemed so easy, so simple. It only depended on Kitty.

He wondered if she cared for him. He tried to recall all the little incidents of their acquaintanceship, he remembered her petulance, her waywardness, the softness of her eyes or voice as she had listened to, or addressed him. Surely it would not be difficult to win her heart, untutored as it was, and racked now with sorrow and shame.

In some things Laurence Moira was still very boyish despite his twenty-six years. There were still tracts in his nature of uncultivated land, and it was one of these tracts that he now discovered, and set out to dig and plough with all the hot ardor of youth.

Had he seen Kitty at that moment he would have flung himself at her feet and made his proposal without a moment's delay.

Perhaps it was fortunate he did not encounter her—for life does not always provide such opportune meetings or meeting-ground as the stage—and in all probability she would have rejected him and his offer at once.

He therefore went back to the house, and consoled himself with a cigar and his own reflections until bedtime.

.

It was not until he had returned to Limerick and found himself among his old associations that the full consciousness of what he had done and what he had promised burst upon the mind of Eugene Maguire.

He knew that his first duty was to go to the bishop and report what had happened, and state his reasons for wishing to resign the office of a priest, but a sudden reluctance held him back. He felt that strange shame of "having fallen from his high estate" that marks the history of would-be saints.

It was terrible to think that fortitude and self-reliance had been but as wisps of straw in the fire of a woman's tempting. Here was no spiritual conflict—no combating of theological doctrines—no scruples of conscience—simply the bold naked truth to be confessed.

"I love this woman more than my office—more than the duty I have sworn—the faith I have cherished. Not only is she the temptress of my life, but a heretic according to the Church I serve, and yet for her I would resign all that I have hitherto looked upon as highest and noblest on earth."

That was what his confession must amount to. That was

what he was bound to pour into the ears of one of the strictest zealots and most austere dignitaries of the Church.

All day he had shut himself up in his study, his mind vibrating between two courses. The passionate dream of that terrible night and the realities of this ensuing day waged an incessant conflict. The one called him down to earth with sweetest tempting, the other waved him back to duty at heaven's stern behest.

His own will and Hermia's will—his own misery and her helplessness kept his mind wavering in the balance, while his soul poured itself out in agonized entreaties for guidance and for aid.

But none came. Flesh and spirit were left to wage the inevitable conflict that sooner or later a man's life demands.

Afar off stood the good and evil angels of his destiny, but neither whisper of encouragement nor prophecy of doom was breathed in his ear.

Toward evening he rose from his knees, spent and exhausted by those fearful hours. He knew his helplessness at last—he looked back at that old self, high-strung to highest purpose, full of sacrifice and determination—and he looked down in contrast on this new self, grown out of an hour's wild, unrestrained passion, ready to give up all its best for sake of all its worst.

For thus looked human love now, when the identity of the lover had once again been sunk in the obligations of the priest.

Yet love was sweet—oh, how sweet he had never known till he had held to his heart once again the one woman who had been its interpreter!

What joy to forget this dark and evil past—this conflict between Godhead and manhood—this never-ceasing, torturing struggle of soul and sense, and in her arms re-live the hopes of youth!

He groaned aloud as in that bare and lonely room he pictured that promised happiness. For well he knew it needed but a word from him to claim its fulfilment. This woman he loved was no niggard giver. Her bounty, her wealth, her loveliness had all been laid at his feet.

He went backward step by step into the depths of his heart, and asked himself whether the wrong he had once done could best be righted by his present self-surrender.

But the question flashed swift answer to his soul, and he knew he was but adding another wrong to that already com-

mitted. "I have put my hand to the plough. I have worked for God's glory. I have rescued sinful souls. I have been given a just and holy work to do—shall I turn back now?" he cried, and as he so cried, his eyes fell on the ivory crucifix hanging on the wall above that *prie-dieu* where he had knelt during many a self-torturing hour.

The martyred face, the helpless figure touched him with a sudden passion of remorse. "Hast Thou suffered and died for me, O Christ, and shall I do naught for Thee?" he cried. "Oh, I am ashamed of my unworthy thoughts, of my lukewarm service."

Then without giving himself time for further hesitation he went forth through the falling dusk and the falling rain to that ordeal of confession and reproof which would deservedly be his fate at the hands of his spiritual father, the bishop.

CHAPTER LI.

It was long past midnight when the priest returned. The paralysis of will had been accomplished. A physical and moral collapse had taken the place of his former fevered and wavering condition.

The gloved hand had been very gentle, but he had felt the pressure of the steel beneath ; he had learnt that persuasion and coercion are words with but slightly dissimilar meaning under certain circumstances.

He had confessed his sin ; he had related its history from beginning to end ; he had thrown the responsibility of decision from off his own shoulders, and now ensued that period of peace after storm which was the natural reaction of that violent conflict.

One promise he had given ; never, if known power could prevent it, to see Hermia again. He might write and tell her of his changed decision—that at least was her due—but on the morrow he was to leave this part of Ireland for another and more remote district where his labors would be hard, and any chance of communication with Hermia almost impossible.

Late as was the hour, and weak and spent as he was, he yet felt that sleep or rest was impossible until he had sent that message to her.

It was a crisis of life and feeling, and he had worked himself up to that pitch of self-abnegation which has often made men embrace a spiritual spouse more enthusiastically than they would an earthly one.

Yet when he took up his pen and traced that one beloved name for what he felt must be the last time, it seemed to him the hardest task ever appointed him.

The religion of self-repression, chastity, pain, lost its former glow of attraction as he thought of the suffering he was about to inflict on the one human thing he loved.

“ Hermia, my beloved,” he wrote, “ forgive the pain I must inflict upon you. Hermia, what we dreamt of cannot be. The curse and not the blessing of heaven would be mine did I, even

for sake of your sweet love, turn traitor to my order and my God. For twelve long hours I have battled with the promptings of the flesh ; in fasting and in prayer have I fought out my fight at the foot of the Cross, and now at last the victory is not mine but God's. From this hour look upon me as one dead, and give me such pity and forgiveness as such a one might claim. For of earthly love and earthly joy I shall know no more ; such is the will of God made plain before my sight. And you, Hermia,— you will acknowledge some day that it is best we part. Perchance you may yet soften our child's heart and win her love. In that hour plead for me and my forgiveness. It is the last boon I ask of life or earth. For how can she help loving you, my Hermia, when her first anger and shame have given place to the promptings of duty and compassion ? You will have your fill of human joy and sorrow. I would that I could have led you to the foot of that cross where I have laid my burden and my sin—I would that on your bruised soul might fall the balm of consolation ; so might I take with me the blessed hope of our reunion, and in that hope live gladly the brief span of life I feel will be my lot. . . . Hermia—in our wild vows and reckless passion you remembered not the awful barrier that lay between us. . . . On my head lies the shame of a father's crime—on yours would fall the shadow of its awful memory. Think of this, my one beloved on earth, and acknowledge with me that the sin of the past would have been as nothing before the sin of the future. And now farewell—word of bitterness and woe that again and again it has been our fate to utter. In a grave of eternal silence I bury this earthly love. It is God's will—so best ! ”

The tears of a man's agony blotted these last words, but the hand that wrote them was firm as the purpose of his broken heart.

Of such are the sacrifices best loved of heaven !

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That letter lay unopened among many others while Hermia lay in her darkened room battling for life. Very, very near came the grim shadow for which she humbly prayed ; very closely hovered the brooding wings of that dread angel whom alike we call upon, and shun.

But though it sat upon the threshold of that dreary house it

did not cross it. After many days the weary eyes looked back on life once more, and the dulled brain awoke to the consciousness of pain and the hopelessness of fate.

Slowly strength returned, and memory awoke.

Then she remembered what lay behind her in the past, and before her in the future. An uneasy sense of the promise she had exacted haunted her incessantly. Where was Eugene—did he know—had he been there?

Her glance wandered uneasily to the face of Judith Montessor.

“Have any letters, any messages, come for me?” she asked.

“Several letters, dearest,” said her friend. “But you are scarcely strong enough to read them yet. Probably they are of no importance.”

“Let me see them, Judith,” she entreated, and the sudden flush on her cheek, the feverish brightness of her eyes, warned Judith that opposition might be as imprudent as concession. She went over to the writing-table in the window, and brought back a packet of letters and papers that had been laid there as they arrived.

Hermia turned them over with rapid fingers. At one she paused. The postmark was Limerick; some instinct told her from whom it came.

She threw the others aside and lay back on her pillows and opened it.

Judith moved over to the window. She did not wish to seem watchful or intrusive. In the silence she heard the rustling of the paper, then a sharp, quick cry.

She turned at once. Hermia lay like death. The letter had fallen from her unconscious hand. Terrified and angry at her own imprudence, Judith rushed to her side, and did her utmost to revive her. The nurse had gone downstairs to tea, and for a moment or two she wondered whether it would be best to summon her, or act on her own responsibility. But Hermia soon revived, and even in her relief Judith was glad that no curious eyes or ears were beside her.

“The letter!” she cried, “the letter!” and seized it eagerly, and then turned her head away and lay there silent and pale, the tears streaming slowly down her cheek. Judith murmured tender words of soothing, but she took no heed.

“Leave me alone,” she entreated. “My sorrow is beyond

all human aid. Let me bear it in silence and solitude, I beseech you."

Judith withdrew into the dressing-room adjoining, leaving the door partly open. The mystery of Hermia's illness and suffering lay with that letter, she felt assured. Would it ever be explained?

It was not mere feminine curiosity that tormented her, but the curiosity of interest and fear. Something terrible must have happened on that night which was to have been their last at Mount Moira. This illness—the change both in the woman and the girl—how were they to be accounted for?

She sat by the fire in that inner room listening to the low faint sobs that from time to time broke the stillness. They were agony to her, but she felt that they might be relief to the aching heart of that suffering woman. When at last they ceased, she stole softly in. Hermia had fallen asleep from sheer exhaustion—the letter on which her tears had rained was clasped to her breast.

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Hours had passed. Again and again had the patient watcher crept into the darkened room. Long since she had ordered the nurse to remain downstairs until summoned, but she herself had remained within call.

Intense silence reigned throughout the house. Not a foot-fall but was subdued by the encasement of slippers—not a voice but was hushed to a whisper. In prayerful thankfulness Judith listened to the soft, regular breathing, and counted the passage of each long hour. Sleep was food and medicine to that exhausted system and that wearied brain. She hailed it as surest and best sign of recovery.

She lit the lamp in the dressing-room as the darkness increased. From time to time she fed the fire with wood which she carried in piece by piece. Seven o'clock—eight o'clock—then nine struck softly from the distance. Still the sleeper slept on, and the patient watcher waited.

At last she started up. A faint voice cried, "Judith—are you there?"

"Yes, dearest," she said cheerfully, and entered, carrying the lamp. Its shaded rays showed her Hermia's face, calm and composed to patient sadness—her eyes wore once more their old look of welcome.

"What is the time?" she asked. "I feel so much better. I seem to have been asleep for weeks." Her glance wandered from Judith's anxious face and fell on the letter still clasped in her hand.

She looked at it with puzzled eyes. Then—memory returned—and pain stabbed her sharply once again.

"Oh, I remember now," she said faintly. "Come and sit by me, Judith, and let me tell you all; for I can bear it in silence no longer."

"You shall tell me what you please, dearest," said Judith gently, "if you will first take some nourishment. It is hours since you have had anything, and nurse was in despair."

"Give me what you please," said Hermia resignedly. "It is not fair to cause you more trouble and anxiety than have already been your lot. I am going to be good and obedient now, Judith; I want to get well, for my work is not yet done. There is a grave duty to perform before life and I say good-bye to one another."

An hour later Judith Montessor had heard everything. Pained and shocked and grieved as she had never yet been grieved, she held the suffering woman's hand and listened to her broken confession.

Yet her heart held only compassion. It seemed to her that *here*, at least, the sin had been more than atoned for by its punishment. She could only murmur again, "A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou dost not despise."

Broken indeed was Hermia Ellingsworth's pride—contrite indeed that suffering heart.

"I have sinned—I have suffered—my punishment is just," she cried. "Yet, Judith, I never meant to be *bad*—I never thought——"

She stopped abruptly. "Do you know," she said, "that Kitty hates me? She looks on me only as her enemy. There lies my cross, Judith . . . a heavy one indeed. To others motherhood may come as a divine gift—to me it can be but one long humiliation."

"You must not expect too much from her at first," said Judith. "She has inherited a fair share of your pride, and think what you would have felt under similar circumstances."

"I loved my mother well enough to forgive her anything."

"Yes, but you loved her as a child loves. A child to whom wrong and right are merely ends leading to reward or displeasure. Kitty has no such softening memories to counter-

balance her hot young anger. She feels she has been wronged. But in time she will also learn to forgive that wrong."

"I think," murmured the stricken woman, "that there is no sacrifice I would not make to win that forgiveness; only once to feel my child's arms round me, and hear her voice say: 'Mother, I will try to love you.'"

"More impossible things have happened," said Judith gently. "The girl is much changed. She is gentler and graver than I have ever known her. Sometimes I fancy that she is learning life's great lesson—Love. She is most anxious about you, and to-day, when I told her that long-hoped-for sleep had come at last, I saw the tears in her eyes. She went away to her room and locked herself in. I believe she is there still."

Hermia sighed. "Will she ever seek me of her own accord—will she ever come to me as a daughter to her mother?"

There was a momentary silence. It held a prayer that scarcely hoped for answer, and yet—was it an answer that came in a sudden hesitating knock—a timid voice—a soft inquiry for admission?

Judith Montessor stood for a moment holding open the door, and her eyes turned wonderingly to the agitated face of Kitty.

"You may come in, certainly," she said. "But she is very weak and ill. She cannot bear much agitation."

Then she closed the door and left them.

There was a moment's silence. The deathly pale face on the pillows looked half in fear at the approaching figure. Her heart-beats quickened to those loud painful throbs that the least agitation had of late occasioned.

The girl stood beside her and looked down, her eyes shining through a mist of tears, her whole face quivering with emotion.

"What is it, Kitty?" asked Hermia faintly.

"I have come to tell you something," faltered the girl. She held out her hand as she spoke. "Do you remember this?" she said.

Hermia looked vaguely at the little ivory and silver trifle that lay in the pretty pink palm.

"No," she said, "what is it?"

"It is—something," said Kitty in a low, breathless voice, "that has made me ashamed of my rudeness and ingratitude to you. . . . It is something that I once promised you I would

keep for ever. You remember that day in the ruins—when you were so kind to me? . . . I could tell you now the very words you said, and how you seemed to me as an angel from heaven. . . . I have kept this ever since. When I went to school I took it with me. I had forgotten it for many years—but it lay safe in my own little desk, and I found it there an hour ago. I don't know what made me go to it, or open it. I was waiting to hear of you . . . they said this sleep meant life or death——”

“And did you care which it would prove, Kitty?”

“I cared so much that I—I *prayed* you might recover. I begged of God not to let you die until I could come to you. I only wanted to say, ‘Forgive me! . . . I will try to do my duty—I will try to love you—*mother*.’”

“Kitty! Kitty! this is not you speaking. I am dreaming.”

“No . . . no!” cried the girl choking back her sobs. “It is I indeed.”

“And you called me—mother. . . . The name has a strange sound, my child—I have waited for it so many years.”

“You shall wait for it no more. I will say it again, and again, and yet again—the sweetest word in the world to me now—Mother!”

“Ah, not with your lips, child, but with your heart. That will mean life to me again. I nearly gave mine for yours, Kitty—once; but now, ah now, you have repaid the debt.”

“Oh, I have been vile, vile; wicked beyond all words! You can't forget the awful things I said; the way I have treated you.”

“I can forgive everything, Kitty, everything. Only put your arms round me, and kiss me as my child at last.”

Then in silence and tears, those long-estranged lips met, and in that meeting all was pardoned.

CHAPTER LII.

No greater magician is there in all the world than love, and love it was that had broken down all the wilfulness and pride and antagonism of Kitty.

It had come to her suddenly and in strange guise, as antagonist, not as friend, but all the same it *had* come, and all the meaning of life was changed for her.

Sorrow no longer filled the air, resentment no longer filled her heart and made her eyes sullen and her words rebellious. A magic wand had struck the stony rock, and at last the waters gushed forth. Her past seemed now as a hateful dream, and she herself looked in her own sight as its most hateful figure.

A new existence dawned for her from the hour that that stern rebuke had shamed her in her own eyes, and in the eyes of the one being whose good opinion she had craved.

Crushed and humbled she had avoided him for days. When they met again she was cold and haughty, but he treated her with such grave and gentle courtesy that pride was soon disarmed. Step by step he forced each barrier she raised, telling her plain truths with a frankness that in any other man but an Irishman would have seemed positively rude.

She was very lonely and very unhappy. She grew to fear her own society, and to long for his. Even scolding and rebuke grew sweet when he was their exponent, and certainly a stranger courtship was never carried on.

By fits and starts the old Kitty would crop up in rebellion, but she had found a master and she had to acknowledge the mastery. From the eerie shadows of her uncertain fate had sprung a great and wonderful joy. To be loved, cared for, considered, to feel that for one human being she was all-important, these were novelties indeed; and she let herself be captured by them with a sudden passionate relief, a feeling that at last the cruel chains of circumstance were falling from her limbs, that she was free to love and rejoice, to turn from remorseful memories to timid hopes.

Laurence Moira noted and exulted manlike in the change. She was so lovely in this new shyness, in her changeful moods, her girlish petulance, that to tease and soothe, to rebuke and praise became the most delightful of tasks. He was not sure that he was in love, but he knew that she loved him, and the duty he had set himself grew correspondingly easy.

Kitty's consciousness of her own deficiencies made her humble before his corrections. She began to see life through his eyes, and it bore a very different meaning to what her own immature judgment had lent it.

He showed her that she had no right to blame her mother's ignorance of her existence for the hardships of that existence, and even those hardships took a new face upon them as his eloquence painted Biddy's tender care and unfailing love. Were not these things to be grateful for? he asked.

Then in the long days of anxiety that followed their first quarrel he persuaded her to accompany him in his visits to the poor and wretched homes of those among whom he worked. He showed her, by contrast with these, the fortunate conditions of her own lot, and in thinking of the miseries of others she ceased to brood over the all-importance of her own.

And as she saw him among these people, cheering, encouraging, helping them, never impatient, never hopeless, speaking as man to man, with a wide comprehension both of faults and virtues, she could not but admire and reverence his character. Everywhere she heard his praises; every humble homestead had something to tell; blessings followed his footsteps, and hope awoke at his presence. It was little wonder he became a hero in her sight, and the higher grew her estimate of him the less she thought of herself.

And at last he spoke of love—and into her heart flowed the gracious healing stream that was henceforth to baptize her to new life. She fell at Love's feet conquered and abased, she gained at Love's hands the regeneration of womanhood.

For happy, lonely days they kept their secret: he half wondering at her every-increasing charm—proud with a lover's pride—yet gently masterful as best suited her wayward moods; cold at times that she might grow humble, humble at times that she might grow proud of her conquest.

The girlhood in her was triumphant, but the womanhood made her very meek. For at last she had learnt her lesson,

Love had made her understand. It had opened the book of her soul, and forced her to read what once she had scorned and derided. Her lover's lips had kissed her out of the sleep of ignorance. She could no longer sit in judgment on another. She could but fall before the judgment seat and cry: "So might I have been, had he I loved been less worthy."

And this was the Kitty who stole penitent and remorseful to her mother's side while yet the wings of the Death Angel hovered over the threshold she crossed.

This was the child—who comprehending at last what Love may be and Love may do, cast pride and anger away for ever—and saw no longer a sinner but a martyr, in the suffering woman by whose side she knelt.

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Slowly, very slowly, Hermia crept back on the path of recovery. But her mind was at rest. The burden of past years was flung off at last. A child's love, a faithful friend's devotion, were these not things to be glad for still?

But it was a very tremulous and chastened gladness with which she greeted returning life, and armed herself to face its duties.

As yet she knew nought of Kitty's secret. Her lover had persuaded her to keep it until he should see Hermia again.

He felt the knowledge would come better from his lips, and his will was law to the once rebellious girl. So when Hermia was at last allowed downstairs his opportunity came.

The New Year had come and gone. Warm soft mists and gentle rains were the heralds of coming spring. The sunshine was already at work, drawing scents of peat and moss and wild flowers from out the moist earth. The air had the touch of velvet, so warm it was and soft on this west coast.

Lady Ellingsworth came into the familiar rooms like a wan ghost revisiting past scenes, and Laurence Moira as he looked at her changed face, and read its sorrow, and its ended joys, felt that for her the spring of hope was for ever past. Never had he felt such pity or such reverence as now he felt for her. But it was only the reverence she read as he took her hand, and in brief words told her his tale.

Silently she listened. She knew only too well she could have desired no better fate for her child, but—she asked herself—did he know?

She turned and looked at him.

"There could be but one answer," she said, "to such a request as yours, but first I have something to tell you—something that——"

"That I know already," he said softly. "Can I put more plainly the honor that is mine, when I say that to be Kitty's lover is less to me, than to be your child's husband?"

Wondering and incredulous she rose to her feet and stood before him, her white face and trembling lips betraying her agitation.

"Do you know what *that* means?" she asked. "Have you counted the cost of what you do? Have you thought of your name—of what will be said?"

"I have thought of all," he said. "It is not only that I love Kitty, but I reverence you more than words can say. There is no need to say more. My wife is safe from any breath of shame, and her mother's honor is mine!"

She sank back in her chair, and covered her face with her hands.

"I don't deserve that you should save me," she said; "I am prepared to pay the penalty of my sin. And Kitty——"

"Kitty thinks as I do," he said. "Are you not satisfied? There is no need for further suffering. God knows you have borne enough. And a mistake is no sin—do not blame yourself so harshly. Take some hope, some comfort at last. Believe me, you have one true friend who will never hear a word in your disfavor. The past is dead,—let us bury it in the grave of this old dead year. No one need attend the funeral except ourselves. Why should we bare our grief to an unsympathizing world? Ah, don't weep. . . . Surely there have been tears enough shed by all of us!"

"All?" she echoed, and looked wonderingly at the young pitying face.

"Yes—all," he said very low. "For are not your sorrows mine—now?"

She held out her hand, and with something of that spirit of chivalry she had always kindled in his heart he dropped on one knee by her side, and raised it to his lips.

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A month later Hermia stood again in the familiar library of Knockrea. She was still very weak and fragile, and strength seemed slow to return. On the morrow she and Kitty were

leaving Ireland for that long-postponed visit to Italy. She had come over to the house to give final directions and orders. On their return Kitty was to marry Laurence Moira, and Hermia herself, accompanied by Judith Montessor, intended going to Australia for some years.

She stood now by the writing-table, gazing mournfully at its worn surface and closed drawers. More than anything else this one piece of furniture always brought back her father's memory to her.

She thought of that mysterious letter he had left, and mechanically opened the drawer where she had placed it. There it lay, sealed with the well-known seal, holding in tantalizing secrecy the mystery of his strange actions.

Could it tell her more, she wondered, than she already knew; would it ever throw light on his *reasons* for casting her out of love and home and giving her place to another?

With a sigh she replaced the packet in its drawer, and half mechanically began to open the others. Some were empty, some contained letters, memoranda, all the useless and useful accumulation of busy years. One after another she closed and locked them. A slight difficulty with the last of the row made her use some force. The lock was stiff and the key refused to turn it; half impatient she pulled the drawer out, and sat down to examine it. To her surprise she saw that it was about half the length of any of the others. Stooping her head she looked into the recess from which she had taken it; then thrust her hand into the hollow and felt the smooth panel at the back. A little unevenness caught her finger. She pressed it and felt the point yield; then with roused curiosity she peered into the aperture and saw a gleam of something white. She drew out a packet of letters tied with faded ribbon. With some wonder she turned them over. Her own name caught her sight, prefaced by terms of passionate endearment.

She glanced at the signature. It was unknown to her.

Then she remembered her name had also been her mother's; these must be old love letters of hers, but assuredly they were not written by her father.

She placed them reverently together. She felt she had no right to read what was never meant for her eyes. As she was fastening the old ribbon it suddenly broke, and in collecting the scattered sheets once more her eyes fell on a date. It was the year of her own birth.

Startled by such a discovery, she asked herself wonderingly

how such letters could have been written to her mother at that period of her married life.

They were not her husband's, and yet they were written as only a husband was entitled to write.

Feeling instinctively that some mystery lay within this strangely discovered packet, she took up the one with that incriminating date, and began to read it.

What a history it revealed—hopeless love, wasted passion; fierce struggles between duty and desire, wild woe; impassioned beseeching, the history of past meetings, the hope of future ones.

The blood in Hermia's veins seemed turning to ice as she read. Her mother—the mother she had adored with all her childish soul—was she indeed what these letters seemed to indicate—a false wife?

Her heart stood still with the shock of that moment.

She recalled that face she had worshipped; the clear, true eyes, the tender smile, the pathetic curves of the mouth. . . .

Oh! it was impossible that she could have been guilty, that she could have brought dishonor on husband and children; and yet faithlessness of heart was here, and plain to read . . . and the date . . . that fatal date. The memory of her father's coldness and dislike flashed back to Hermia's mind with the new interpretation of this hateful discovery. No wonder he had scarcely regarded her as his child, if these letters had come to hand at her mother's death. No wonder that in her own girlish folly he had traced the curse of heredity. He had kept the secret well, for never had breath of scandal attached itself to his beautiful wife; but all the same the iron of suspicion must have entered into his soul, and filled it with a stern, relentless purpose.

Now, at last, she understood the meaning of that will. Now, at last, she saw why the child, born of her own shame, had been made the instrument of her own punishment.

Long brooding over a scheme of vengeance had perfected it as cruelly as his nature could perfect it. Coldly and unreservedly he had given himself up to the task of visiting on the child the unproved guilt of the mother.

Hermia remembered how her young lover had been banished. How she had been forced into an unwelcome marriage. How all her life she had been made to feel the iron hand of a despotic and merciless tyrant.

In the bitterness of shame and misery such as never yet had

visited her life, she crushed those fatal letters in her hand, and gazed wildly round as if for some means of destroying them.

A moment and there lay in the open grate but a heap of dull grey ashes, and by them knelt a woman—her head bowed in the dust of agonized humiliation. From out the shadowy past this two-edged sword had been stretched to pierce her heart—to bring her to her knees in this new garden of Gethsemane.

“Just Thou art, O God! and justly hast Thou dealt,” she cried aloud. “But . . . now—for Christ’s dear sake remember mercy . . . for I can bear no more. . . .”

And then perhaps in that comprehensive tenderness that never earthly love has yet attained, the mercy for which she prayed was remembered unto her.

Her limbs grew weak—the glow faded out of cheek and lip as a flame that sinks down amidst decaying embers. One feeble effort she made to raise herself—but it was vain. She fell face forwards on the floor, where still that ominous stain marked with terrible distinctness the tragedy of her father’s fate.

L'ENVOI.

AND so ended Philip Marsden's scheme of vengeance.

The letters he had forgotten, and long before laid by in their secret hiding-place, were the only letters that revealed to his ill-fated daughter what he had determined she should learn in quite another way.

Long before the date fixed for opening that mysterious document about which he had taken so many precautions, Kitty had married her chivalrous young lover and never a hint or word was given as to whose child she was.

On the day when she entered into possession of Knockrea she had also given to that ill-fated abode an heir prospective, and in presence of mother and child Hermia's trustees, Laurence Moira and Dr. Carrick, burnt that unopened letter.

With its destruction a wave of good fortune seemed to have swept away the melancholy and disasters of the past. The busybodies naturally gave their own interpretation to the strange will; but as Kitty's popularity increased, so did their charity and good will, and she was universally declared to be Philip Marsden's lawful child.

When she made over poor Biddy's cottage to her two old cronies, the Red Hen and the Swan, every one had a good word for her, and the old seeress forgot to utter dismal prophecies, and kept an ever-ready stock of blessings on hand for the rapidly increasing members of the Knockrea nurseries.

There was no more popular landlord in the district than Laurence Moira, and no sweeter or more gracious helpmeet was ever given to man than his young wife.

"For love of you I love every human thing," she would say; and accepting the sweet flattery not as his due but as her bounty, Laurence Moira goes his way with a thankful heart.

Surely the best thing in life to carry within us, sad toilers in a vale of tears as we know ourselves to be!

FINIS.

Press Opinion on

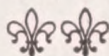
Lindsay's Girl

By MRS. HERBERT MARTIN

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San Francisco Chronicle

"Lindsay's Girl," a novel, by Mrs. Herbert Martin, is somewhat out of the beaten path of imaginative story writing. There is little romance in it. It is the story of the daughter born out of wedlock of an English gentleman of position and wealth who has separated from his wife. She is reared by her father in a luxurious country home and almost without female companionship. The secret of her birth is kept from her until after the death of her father. She is sincere, unpolished and independent, and the story depicts her struggles with herself and the world, and her final triumph through innate purity and sense of duty. Valentine Lindsay, or "Lindsay's Girl," is a strong character. In some respects it is new in fiction, and as it is natural, consistent and altogether human, we give it welcome.



Daireen

By F. FRANKFORT MOORE

Illustrated, 2mo, Cloth, \$1.5 ; Paper Covers, 50 Cents.

Bookseller, Newsdealer and Stationer

"Daireen," by Frank Frankfort Moore, is a novel that will be intensely enjoyed by the large class who like plenty of incident of the dramatic sort, and plenty of character to match, with a generous spicing of love and cross purposes. The quieter student of character and of history will like best the first chapters that introduces us to O'Dermots who, in all the pride of an hereditary King of Munster, and with such pomp as the degenerated times and conditions allow, lives in the tumbling down old castle at Innishdermot. It is an amusing picture, albeit a pitiful one—that of the old Irishman trying to keep up the dignity of his ancestors. But the love story, a very pretty one it is, soon sweeps us away from the Irish hills to a voyage to Cape Town. The voyage itself holds a large place in the story, for the beautiful Irish heroine, who is as free from the world's guile as a bird, is placed in the care of a designing old Major's wife who thinks it her duty to make a desirable match for her before she reaches her father in the distant colony; and she makes a fine muddle of it all, for the real lover is the Macnamara's son, who, unknown to them all, has shipped on the vessel as a sailor, for the sole purpose of being near her. It all works itself out at the Cape, in the curious and deversified society to be found there.

R. F. FENNO & COMPANY, 112 Fifth Ave., N. Y.

A Few Press Opinions on

The Betrayal of John Fordham

BY B. L. FARJEON

12mo, Cloth, \$1.25; Paper Cover, 50 Cents

Saturday Evening Gazette

The plot is well constructed, the story is well told, and there is enough of mystery to satisfy the most exacting reader.

New Orleans Picayune

Mr. Farjeon's new novel is a striking piece of work. It is the story of a man who is deceived into a marriage with a woman who is a victim of confirmed dipsomania. The horror of the situation proves almost too much for him. He falls in love with a good little woman, who learns eventually to love him. But before they are happily married the hero is charged falsely with having murdered his half-brother. The accusation is cleared up by a detective, but not until after many strange and stirring things have come to pass. Like all of Mr. Farjeon's works, it is interesting in a high degree.

Boston Times

"The Betrayal of John Fordham" is a new story by B. L. Farjeon. It is of the detective order, full of murder and innumerable wrongs that became, at length, righted, and the much abused hero comes to happiness as the curtain falls. The working out of the plot, combined with peculiar incidents makes the story worth reading, especially if one likes a detective story. Almost everyone does, for a change.

San Francisco Chronicle

Running through the story are the threads of one or two affairs of the heart, which are woven into pleasant conclusions. Some of the scenes are stirringly dramatic. (New York; R. F. Fenno & Co.; price 50 cents.)

New Haven Journal

A new book, which, like the preceding ones from the pen of the same author, is a strong story and which promises to be extensively read, is B. L. Farjeon's new novel, "The Betrayal of John Fordham."

Brooklyn Eagle

The plot is intricate and deeply involved and dramatically and skillfully worked out.

R. F. FENNO & COMPANY, 112 Fifth Ave., N. Y.

A Few Press Opinions on

A Living Lie

BY PAUL BOURGET

12mo, Cloth, \$1.25; Paper Covers, 50 cents.

Scotsman

Mr. de Vallieres' translation leaves nothing to be desired, and deserves the thanks of English readers for having rendered accessible to them a masterpiece of minute analysis of character and feeling.

Pall Mall Gazette

M. Bourget's celebrated novel. . . . It is good to find a translation of a popular French novel so well done as this is, and the vivid picture of Parisian life loses nothing of its force or truth in its English dress.

World

"Mensonges" is undoubtedly a clever story, and the present version is excellent.

Vanity Fair

The book itself is an education: the very greatest novel of analysis and character France has produced since Balzac.

New York Commercial Advertiser

"A Living Lie," published in this country by Fenno, is one of the earlier works of Paul Bourget, and one that shows both the weakness and strength of his methods. In an introduction written to the translation, the author speaks of his humble deciphsip of Flaubert and Zola, and perhaps none of Bourget's novels better than this recent translation will show better how closely the student has followed the masters, especially the former. But one man could write "Madame Borany," and that was Flaubert, but there are portions of "Mensonges" that would lead one to believe that M. Bourget thought that he might have written it himself. Madame Borany's meeting with her lover in a house of ill-fame and Rene's meetings with his mistress might even seem to some as an illustration of where the pupil had learned his lesson too well.

As for the story itself there is no need of rehearsing that. It is strong, and viewed from the point of fiction is good. But since M. Bourget aspires to be something more than novelist, to be an analyst, a psychologist and feminologist, it would be wrong to ignore what he considers his best labor. Perhaps it would not be malapropos to quote, in relation to M. Bourget's study of women and women's mind, what Nietzsche has written, that we are puzzled when we try to probe women's mind, not because it is so deep, not because it has no bottom—"it is not even shallow." Which is basely cynical, and anyway it was written by a man who is now in a mad house. But, nevertheless, it is a good sentence to bear in mind when one is reading the works of a feminologist. There is no doubt of M. Bourget's intuitive powers. True, that too frequently does he affirm with unbecoming and exultant delight and misplaced passion that two and two are four, but often this leads to the higher and more complicated problems, such as four and four are eight. Surely M. Bourget is an analyst, but he spends too much time analyzing very obvious brick walls.

But, "A Living Lie" is good fiction, if it is not good literature. It is well translated.

R. F. FENNO & COMPANY, 112 Fifth Ave., N. Y.





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